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POOL

her STORIES

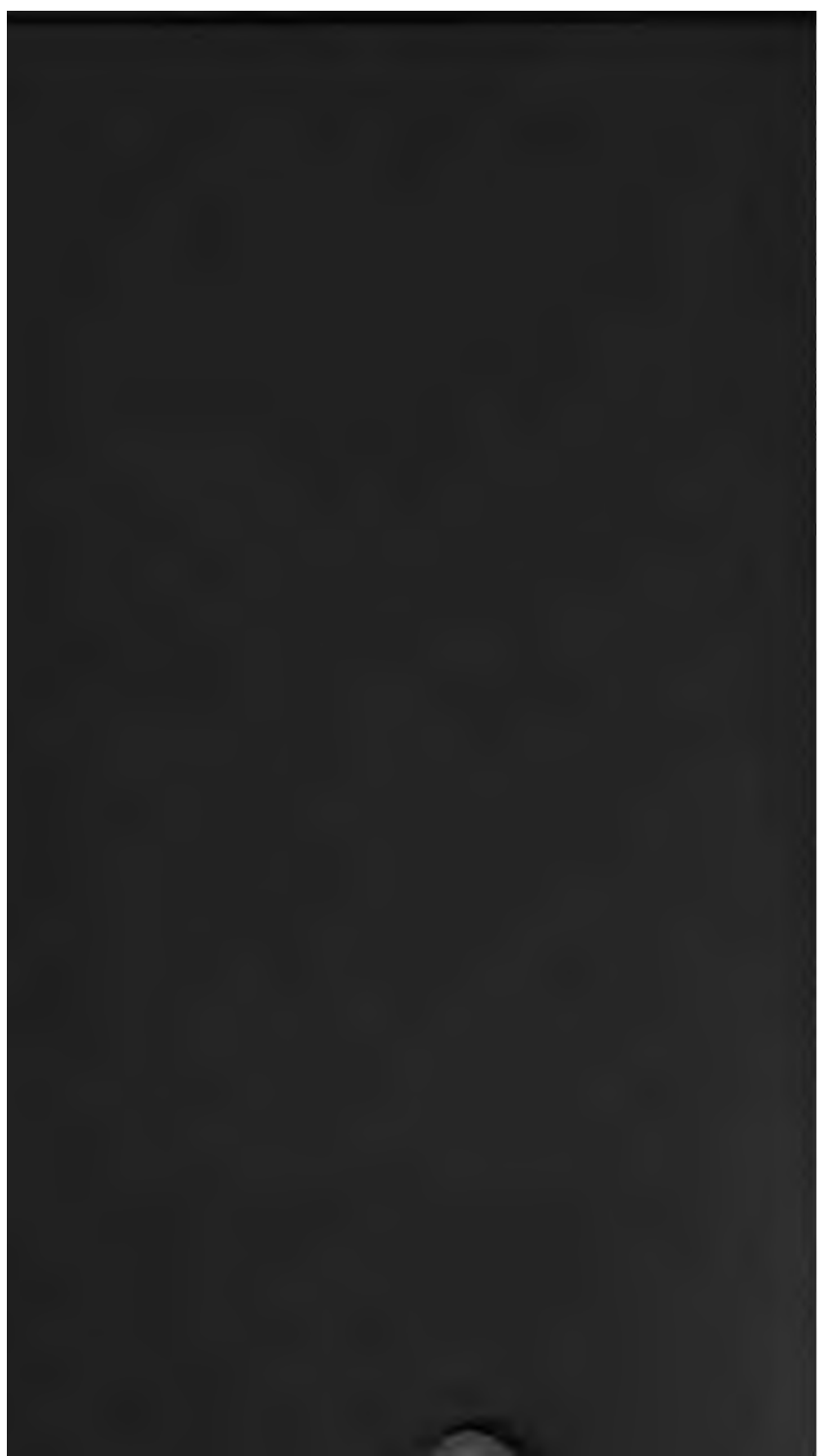


The Rev. F. Janssen
in remembrance of a visit to Claydon
from Margaret M. Verney
1896.

L20

Flo. Neophyte. Sister

THE GREY POOL
AND OTHER STORIES.



The Rev. F. Janssen
in remembrance of a visit to Claydon
from Margaret M. Verner
1896.

120

The Rev. F. Janssen

THE GREY POOL
AND OTHER STORIES.



dorothy wall

McKerney

THE GREY POOL

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

FRANCES PARTHENOPE

LADY VERNEY

LONDON

SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, HAMILTON & CO. LTD

LIVERPOOL EDWARD HOWELL

1891

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a Painting by W. B. Richmond, A.R.A.

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THE GREY POOL

THE GREY POOL.

CHAPTER I.

THE CANAL BOAT.

DULL and slow the long busy line of the Canal stretched out along the flat meadows—the monotonous towing path and a bare hedge beyond keeping step as it were by a dirty black coal barge, with a blank sameness of reiteration, which seemed to make it hardly possible for those on board to know whether any advance was made at all—for ever moving, yet never making any progress.

The day was bleak, the January wind was biting cold and keen; there was sleet in the air, wetting and freezing by turns; it blew in the teeth of the miserable horse which was tugging at the rickety old boat, and in the faces of two little girls who were running behind him, keeping him up to his work with sticks and stones. They were wretchedly clad, and their thin cotton frocks and shawls, their battered bonnets, seemed to let in the icy wind at every point, chilling them to the bone, while they could hardly manage to keep their worn shoes upon their little chilblained feet.

On board the barge, behind the shelter of the central cabin, sat a tall strong man smoking, his jacket and trousers in comfortable order, and leaning on the rudder as his share of the work. Whenever the little girls relaxed their pace or their exertions, he urged them on with an oath or a threat. It was a pitiful sight, the right of the strongest in its worst form, the “I will do what I like with my own,” the true savage instinct of using his womankind as slaves because they were weak and because they were his.

"Come on, Nelly," said the eldest of the two, for the little one had fallen back as her half-bare feet knocked against the sharp flints, "come on, dear, a bit longer, else Father'll pitch into us like anythink."

The horse, however, was tired, and could scarcely be got to move, the children were nearly exhausted and went slower and slower, while the drunken fellow had sunk into a doze, and the whole concern came to a pause where the canal made a turn, and there was a moment's respite from the bitter wind under shelter of a bridge.

"It's quite a nice place," panted little Nelly, "let's cuddle up warm here among them big stones, father haven't a shouten this ten minutes and more."

"We'd best get on a bit further," answered her more prudent sister doubtfully, "it ayn't so very fur to the lock, and then father mun get out hissen."

But the temptation was too strong, and the little pair crouched down for a moment in the dainty shelter, as it seemed to them, among the flints and the mud.

Presently the bargeman waked up fuming with wrath, but the lock was now so near that it was not worth his while to settle himself comfortably again, besides which there was a public house within reach, and he stepped sulkily on to the land, grumbling and half asleep, but shaking his fist at the world in general. The shivering, worn-out children crept timidly past him over the coals with which the boat was laden into the cabin, where they threw themselves on their mother. She was sitting with her elbows on her knees gazing into the dying fire, and her long black elf locks hung about her face escaping out of the red handkerchief bound about her head. She took them into her arms, but it was more with the instinct of a hen gathering her chickens under her wings than any more conscious human action. Gradually, however, her face relaxed, and she lifted little Nelly upon her lap, pulled off the soaked and muddy shoes, and began chafing the cold feet and hands tenderly.

"Why you're a'most perished wi' cold, child; it's starving to-day, that's what 'tis." she said with a sigh.

"I'm well nigh clammed, Mammie," put in poor Rowan* gently, pressing closely up; she was quite as cold and quite as weary as her sister, but she was lanky and sallow and bony and thin, and did not invite caresses like the rounder faced, black-eyed, still rosy-cheeked little Nelly, whom all her hardships could not rob of the childish graces of five years old.

The bargeman's wife reached out her hand, without rising, towards the food hidden in one of the dingiest corners of the smoky dark cabin; it was full of bad smells and bilge water, dirty, mouldy, and unwholesome; nothing indeed but the free passage of air through the gaping boards made it really habitable, though Joan did not appreciate her advantages, and was always striving to stop the crannies with rags and paper. There is a curious horror of fresh air among those who live most in it, and who would theoretically be supposed to suffer most by its absence.

"It ayn't yer Daddy's fault if there's aught left, I know that," she muttered, as she drew out the remains of some half-cold potatoes, the bacon which had made the better part of the mess having all been devoured by the man. These, and a couple of raw turnips, evidently stolen out of some field, a few stale crusts, and a bit of cheese, were all that she had been able to save. She had waited for her own meal till the two little ones came in; they ate their share without a murmur, and then, thoroughly tired out, Rowan crouched down to sleep in a small heap by her mother's side; Nelly held on tightly to her perch as long as she was conscious, and the mother let her stay, not caring to unclasp the child's fingers; the boat was still, they had reached the lock, and her "master" had gone off to drink as usual. She herself sat brooding on in the twilight, staring into the now extinct fire with her great dark eyes wide open, but apparently seeing only the far off in time

* The old Saxon "Rowena," sadly clipt.

and space, and unconscious of what was going on around her.

She was still under thirty; and haggard and worn as was the face, nothing could alter the noble lines of the brow and nose, and of the large eyes sunk deep in shadow. The mouth and chin were not so good, they were heavy, almost sensual. It was the face of one in whom the two halves of man's nature were both strong, the typical white horse and the black pulling in contrary directions, and producing the struggle which of itself is misery.

She had not been born to her present nomad life, but had been a servant girl in a comfortable and very strict methodist family in a small northern country town. She had chafed at the restrictions and petty interferences of the "chapellers," that forging of crimes out of indifferent or completely innocent actions, which makes life a weariness and a stumbling block to characters with the boiling passion for freedom and desire for excitement, born with many strong natures. "Well guided," their very strength would make them among the best of their race; but thwarted and stunted, it only serves to drive them out into the desert places and the storms of life.

On one of her rare free Sundays, Joan had gone, "unbeknownst," for an "out" on the river with a set of people whom she knew would be particularly obnoxious in every way to her masters. The "ploy" had ended, much to her distress, by the whole party stopping at a public house some way from the town for "refreshments."—It is a large word for quantities of all kinds, time included. "Hap, you'll be in plenty time," reiterated one and another of the company in answer to her remonstrances, till at last finding to her horror that she had long outstayed her time, she was just leaving the door and starting anxiously home alone, when she encountered the most rigid elder of the chapel, face to face. He looked at her for a moment as if he could not believe his eyes, then drawing near, he said in his sternest tones—

"Is this the right place or the right dealings for a Sabbath eve, girl? I must think it well to let my brother Simpson know where, and in what company, I have seen his handmaid." And he passed on without another word or look.


She turned back to the group which she had just left. "There's my place and my character gone!" she cried passionately. "They'll never forgie me, won't they Simpsons. Or, if I were kep', 'twould be mewed up like a bird i'th' cage, not 'lowed outside the door, neither Sundays nor week-days, and I must have my 'out' sometimes, with all the washin', and the cookin', and the prayin' and fussin' as is goin' on."

"I'll tell thee what thou'st best do, and that's just to wed wi' me!" said the most reckless of the men present, a tall, handsome fellow, belonging to the barges from her own part of the county, and well known up and down as the most daring, headstrong man about; rather hasty tempered, and mixed up with all the fights and troubles that he could anyhow thrust himself into. She had been avoiding his rough gallantries all the afternoon, for Mark Ogden was considered a queerish chap; "his gets is great, but he just cobs 'em all away," was the general verdict; but size and strength are always greatly respected, as in the days when Hercules was made a god, and Joan was flattered by the admiration of the "strong man" of the company, though she had been protesting all day, "He dunno win (please) me, that's what he dunno."

She could not now help listening a little, however, as he went on pressing his advantage.

"Thou'll be fine and big (proud) wi' a house o' thine own, and nobody to say thee nay, i' th' stead o' screwed up i' one place allays, so unhealthful! and there thee'd see the world like, and never tired on 't, for ye'd hardly be in one place wi' me afore we're off again."

"I must see and think about it by-and-by," answered Joan, pre-occupied and miserable, and not much delighted



with the prospect. But her mind changed when, on arriving at home, she was received (as was only natural) with great indignation by her master and mistress. All the terrors of this world and the next came pouring down upon her in a perfect shower-bath of angry words from both at once. Half in fright, and half in obstinacy, she refused to give a promise never to go out again on Sunday, upon which condition only would they consent to keep her, and she was summarily dismissed.

"Whatever shall you do without a character?" said her mistress anxiously. She was a good woman, though a little stiff in her goodness, and had compassion on the motherless girl, whom she would gladly have helped if it had been possible according to her lights.

"I'm a goin' to be married," answered Joan haughtily, almost, as it seemed to herself, without any will of her own. "'Twere as if I were just druv to say it! There, I couldn't nohow help it! It were just to be!" she said afterwards, with a dismal fatalism.

And so she sealed her own miserable fate at eighteen, and turned herself out on the wide world for the remainder of her life. Some punishments seem to be so disproportionately hard for the offence or mistake which brings them about. And the bitterest, heaviest burden of all is reserved for the accident, as it so often is, of marriage, when the wrong lot has been chosen.

It was a wretched life, and she had known a better in every way. As the novelty of it wore off, she grew more and more unhappy, while the possibility of any improvement in her lot seemed to become farther and farther off. The perpetual wandering existence of a bargeman, subject to no restraint, even that of neighbours, utterly outside the law, except when some peculiarly brutal act brings them into the notice of the settled community, and the impossibility of any school or training for children, who change their place of abode almost every night of their lives, all combined to make the old "Navvy" (the word has now

changed its meaning) into a sort of Ishmael, his hand against every man, and every man's hand against him.


Joan had a bitter tongue, and she stung her husband sometimes to the quick with her reproaches, while not even the chance of a blow could quell her fiery spirit, especially when she was roused like a lioness in defence of her young. When Mark was not drunk, and in tolerably good humour, he was not unkind, either to wife or child, but no one could depend upon his mood for an hour together, and woe betide the living thing, human or brute, which crossed his temper when the spirits were in him and the wits were out; he was more like a wild beast than a man at such times.

This winter the drinking bouts had been even longer and worse than usual. Poor Joan did not know in what direction to turn for help; all the money which he gained was spent at the public-houses along the canal side, and she and her children were half-starved, in addition to their other grievances.

As the summer season came on, however, each year, life always grew more tolerable; the lazy motion of the barge in the soft warm air soothed even Mark's temper, and his womankind began to breathe.

They were moving north into their own old county, to fetch a load of cut stones, a much cleaner and less aggravating cargo than the coal, and when they had nearly reached their destination, the leaks, which were many, became so bad that, to the great joy of the children, and still more to that of their mother, it was found necessary to overhaul the crazy old boat entirely.

Accordingly, they passed up a branch canal, along a narrow rocky valley to a spot under the hill where the water spread into a little quiet lake, and a wild encampment of wooden shanties shewed where the repair of the barges was carried on. It looked like the end of all things; the way seemed entirely blocked by a steep promontory, but for the arch of a short, sharp, black, mysterious-looking



tunnel piercing right through the heart of the ridge, and hung with branching wych elms, beautiful old feathery ash, and rowan trees.

The pool was nearly surrounded by a bit of forest, full of tall hollies, and tangled fern growing in among the big stones, where the birch and oak found a scanty livelihood.

"Only look at them posies," said Nelly, as the boat was brought in amidst the great bunches of yellow-flags, purple loosestrife, and flowering rush, a perfect garden of wild flowers which sprung up amongst the barges lying about in different picturesque stages of decay, some in and some part out of the water. Blue smoke rose out of the rude sheds for the forges and carpenters' shops, whose boarded walls were daubed with brilliant colours, a sort of gigantic palette of red, blue, orange, and black, where rustic artists had tried their effect and combination before using them on the boats. The noise of the hammering came sounding back from the steep overhanging hillside with a certain softness in the echo, making almost musical that not very melodious clang, as Joan came down the steep path from the scattered village above. She had spent the morning away in search of a temporary home.

"Hast thee fund a lodging for theeself and the childer?" enquired Mark, looking up from his engrossing pipe.

"We shall just goo to the Robin Hood cottage, and bide wi' Mercy Gaunt, she's cousin by my mother's side. She does the washin' for the big house, and I'm not like to have forgot the ironing and the gettin' up I done for they Simpsons so long. And Mercy's very throng now, and there'll be plenty o' work for me, for th' young squire's just come home from furrin parts, and there's going to be a sight o' folk stoppin' at the Ha'. Old madam, she's been quiet enow sin' the auld Squire Heron's death, but she'd cut off her hand for to pleasure Mr. Lawrence, Mercy says."

"I dunot choose to be beholden to them o' th' Hall," muttered Mark sulkily, mindful of poaching raids on the

pheasants and trout in times past, and with a vivid intention of expeditions in the time to come.

"The childer canna clem, and pretty much you'll gie to kip 'em—ye canna pick and choose like that," said Joan shortly.

Mark grunted, it was his manner of giving assent. In truth it was extremely convenient for him at that moment to get rid of the burden of his womankind in so easy a fashion, and Joan hastily made up the small bundle of their worldly goods, and went back to the children, who were cowering among the fern on the hillside, waiting anxiously for the success of the negotiation with their father. She set off with them at once for the Robin Hood cottage.

Their way led through the wood, along an ancient pack-horse paved track, which went up and down among the steep rocks, utterly regardless of levels, apparently wherever the patient animals had chosen their own path. The trees were just bursting into leaf, and the ground where the underwood had lately been cut was carpeted with bunches of primroses, pale wood anemones, dog violets, and blue wild hyacinths. She could hardly get the little girls along, as they darted in and out among the flowers like a couple of puppies.

"Oh, isn't it just pretty! Mother, you mus' wait!" cried little Nelly imperiously, as she sat with her lap full of flowers, while Rowan twisted a garland for her and crowned the small queen of the wood.

"And such a nice place for to hide in, nobody couldn't catch ye for hours if ye didn't want to," said poor Rowan, with a dismally precocious experience of the hardships of life.

The Robin Hood cottage stood at the edge of the wood, on a shelf in the hill, with a high rough retaining wall in front; a little croft lay behind, and an orchard, where, in the intervals of the old apple and walnut trees, hung the washerwoman's long lines of fluttering clothes. The projecting point overlooked the sweeps of craggy hills,



folding one over the other, some fringed with trees, some clad with the brilliant green of the limestone pastures and broken by bare rock, while the lines of the white road and a dashing river crossed and recrossed each other far down the dale. Higher up the stream the dale narrowed very much, tall masses of rock and fantastic tors rose out of the thick foliage, with the gables surmounted with stone balls of a grey old manor house just seen among the trees.

Mrs. Mercy Gaunt was a notable stirring body, very clean, as befitted a "washywoman," and not a little particular, having no children of her own. She was really glad of Joan Ogden's help at the present pinch, but she made a favour of her own convenience, like some other folk.

"I canna bear to be fashed wi' childer, and they all looks just like beggars, quite pitiful, as one may say!" she complained that night to old Nat, her husband, that most useful functionary "the odd man," who did great part of the other servants' work up at the great house. He considered the new arrivals in a far more favourable light. "The little un's as pretty a piece o' goods as I've set eyes on this long while, and Rowan, as is thy mother's namesake, is a nice little mayd enou', and favours her, too, i'th' face. Thee'll soon comb 'em and clean 'em like a set o' new pins—there's no dirty things ever seen in *thy* house, all the country knows *that*."

Mrs. Gaunt smiled; her husband's little compliment smoothed the ruffled waters.

Little Nelly was sent to Mrs. Heron's school, Rowan was of too much use to be spared except on rare occasions. Joan did not profess any equality in her treatment of her children. Nelly was her darling; she had come to her after the loss of a little boy, who had died of the hardships of their hardest winter, and the mother's heart had been so wrung that her whole soul was bent on keeping the new baby alive. Mark had taken great umbrage against its sex.

"What's the use o' yer havin' another gurl?" repeated

he angrily, as if she were to blame. "What's the use o' girls, I'd like to know? I could ha' bred up a boy for to mind the 'orse and a' in no time!"


But the child grew so pretty and so winning that she softened even him to tenderness when he was sober. She was an adventurous, high spirited little thing, always keeping her mother in hot water; her crimes, however, were always imputed to the small nurse Rowan, five years older than herself, who was punished vicariously when Nelly got into mischief, while Joan clung more passionately to the baby culprit.

CHAPTER II.

A LULL.

MARK found sufficient work and pastime up and down the country to be in no hurry to go back to his boat, but as time went on, and Joan had begun to look forward with dread to the return to their old miserable life, the newly done up barge was chosen to join in conveying a regiment of Guards from London to Liverpool on their road to Ireland. It was the usual mode of transit in those days, and not an unpopular one. The men stood and lay about in the boats, sleeping under tarpaulins at night, and cooking in the little black cabins, while the officers rode along the towing paths, or amused themselves by finding country roads which led to the same destination as the canal. In summer weather it was a very pleasant change from the barracks, with a touch of gipsy life not without its charm, and a curious contrast to the rush of their present railroad passage to fresh quarters.

"You'll not be wanting, Joan," said her lord, who had come up to give his orders to his wife, and stood leaning against the doorpost, looking into the cottage kitchen with



its clean stone floor. "The men brings their own wives wi' 'em, what washes and minds 'em and cooks likewise, so you'd best stop where you be for the present."

Poor Joan took a long breath; no reprieve was ever more welcome.

"Well, I scarce know what I should ha' done wi'out thee," Mrs. Gaunt vouchsafed to say coming out of the laundry, "wi' a' this ruck o' folk at the Ha', and fine linen and gaufferin and a'; and Mr. Lawrence's shirts—leastways, the young squire, I should say, on'y I canna shape my tongue to it as have know'd him from the first day he come into the world. They shirt frills is allays on my mind, though I can't say as ever he giv' me a hasty word; for a good tempered babby he were ever sin' he were borned and since. Will ye come in and tak' a sup o' summat, Mark?" she added, though not in a very cordial tone.

He made a step inside the house, a "sup" of anything was not to be despised.

"Here's my brother, Will Ratcliffe, a comin' up the hill" said Mercy, however, presently, not quite without malicious intentions.

"I mun be off, I havn't any time to lose, wi' all them soldiers on me directly," muttered Mark hastily, looking with much distaste at the old keeper, who climbed slowly up the steep wood path, in his velveteen coat, brown leather leggings, and dark breeches. Close behind his heels came the great black retriever, "Douro"; the two indeed were never seen apart; dog and man were on the most intimate terms. "She can do everything but speak, that ayn't no detriment to me, bless her, for she says things a deal better wi'out talking nor any human creetur as I knows on wi' their long tongues to 'em," her master often declared, somewhat cynically as to the merely men and women of his acquaintance. "And what's Master Mark arter this turn, I'd like to know?" said the old man, wrinkling up his grizzled eyebrows, as he watched Mark's rather headlong progress down the hill. "Arter shootin' of

they trout I'll be bound! There were a great big un, weighed a matter o' three pounds and a quarter, if he weighed an ounce, as I misses sin' Toosday out o' the Grey Pool, and no mistake. I heerd the gun, too, at daybreak, and Mark were seen along the dale i' the top o' the mornin'." Fly fishing is all very well for those who have leisure for the pastime, but when wanted for the pot, by either poacher or keeper, the trout are shot.

"Th' auld squire were got very easy like about the game and the fishin', and he niver able to go out," said Nat, who had just come in from his work, "but Mr. Lawrence is like to be sterner wi' folk."


"He's a fine young fellow is the young master to look at sin' he come back from furrin parts, straight and tall, wi' a word and a smile for every one he meets, free wi' his hand to them as wants; but for a' that he will ha' his work done," observed Mercy approvingly.

"But I wouldna counsel no man to mak' free wi' the pheasants for a' that," added her husband laughing.

"And I should like to know why he should, either," cried old Ratcliffe indignantly, "and them poachers a takin' what isn't theirn, and is reared at greater cost nor barn door chickens, as I can tell that feeds 'em, and they knows it too! A pund a head they costes the squire, when a's counted, if its a penny. And them lazy fellows, as dunna like work, and goes about wi' a good coat to their backs and a good gun to their shouthers, wi' sellin' pheasants up and down at good prices, aye, and trout too! And to hear some folk talk, as if 'twere starvin' men snarling a hare for to feed their wives and childer. Pretty much our fellows would laugh at that, I reckon."

"What ha' ye got for me, Uncle Will?" interrupted little Nelly, sidling up to him as he sat by the ingle, "you promised as ye would bring me summat from the fair next time you went."

With her bright black eyes, her high colour, and masses of shining dark hair, the wilful and wayward little beauty




carried all before her. She was a privileged person in the house, whose wishes everybody obeyed, not even excepting old Mercy, whose moral maxims, however conscientiously aired from time to time, were always ignored in her favour.

"See thee here," said old Will, "here's a bit o' ginger-bread for thee—they says 'twere King Solomon wi' a gilt crown of his head, a judging o' the two babbies alongside 'im. And here," he went on, pulling a broadside out of the other pocket, "is the last speech and confession of a man what's a going to be hanged, and his story writ underneath, wi' a pretty pictur' o' him danglin' from the rope."

Rowan heard in the inner room, and came forth to join the group, her little arms were wrinkled with hot water, her cheeks were pale and her nose was red, she had been hard at work all the morning.

"Have ye put the blue i' the starch ready for yer Aunt? she'll be back in two minits," said her mother a little sharply.

Poor Rowan drew back into her hole, she could hear the explanation of the fascinating picture of the hanging going on at great length, while she was to keep to the sloppy, dark, damp, washing place, and poor little Cinderella wiped away a few tears. Though she never grudged Nelly any of her good things, she would have been glad to have been allowed to pick up a few of the crumbs that fell from the rich portion allotted to her sister, and she longed with an aching sense of want for the warm kisses and tender caresses lavished on Nelly, and which never fell to her share.



CHAPTER III.

DARKENING CLOUDS.

AT the end of his expedition with the regiment, Mark returned in a very cross mood, and not at all content with his treatment. He had been well paid enough, but the military discipline, the order in which he had been kept, were not at all to his taste. Ishmael does not like the yoke, nor the wild ass the burden; and he indemnified himself for his forced good conduct by an outbreak of stormy riotous idleness, drinking, gambling, and poaching, so that his wife heard of his lawless doings in all directions.

It was the last of September, when, having exhausted not only his money but all means of getting more without work, he one day appeared at the Robin Hood cottage. Joan was alone among the soapsuds; Mrs. Gaunt had gone up to the Hall.

"We shall ha' to be off, ever so quick, Joan," said he sulkily. "Th' auld measter says as I shanna ha' the barge at a' if I dunno go o' Toosday. I hanna got a brass farden left, and I mun ha' some brass. Uncommon smart that child is, to be sure! Why, I shuldna ha' known her, scarce," muttered he, as Nelly came in from school, with a little red cloak tied round her neck, and her bright black eyes shining under a new straw hat. She drew back when he eyed her askance, and ran away when he called her. She did not like dirty rough-looking men, with her present associations, and was growing spoilt and fastidious; while the duties of relationship are not very distinct at five years old.

Mark was vexed, for he cared for the child after his own selfish fashion. "And that's how you learns the childer!—to behave bad to me and to disobey. Pretty schoolin' that! And yersen as fine as han's can mak' ye," he added, looking angrily at the comfortable appearance and dress which his poor wife had developed in the ease of her new position.

"The little un's shy," pleaded Joan, "and I mun go respectable, or Mercy wouldna let me work for the house—and it's old madam giv' Nelly the red cloak. I've worked hard, heaven knows, for to rig her out decent for school, that she shouldna be ashamed among the rest. I owe for the hats as 'tis; Rowan's is for Sundays, and I promised a crown as to say Toosday, that's to morrow; I puts it bye by littles, as I can spare out of my wages over and above our keep," said the poor woman, with a rising in her throat.

"Well, I mun ha' summat, so ye just gie me the crown," answered her master, yawning, and stretching out his arms.

"And the higler's money as I mun pay, for I'd promised?" gasped Joan.

"Thou'st best do as I tell thee," growled Mark, his choler rising. "Some money I will ha'! Thou shalt want ere I do. Gie it me, I say! or I'll ma' such a row that yon pickpocketty old Mercy o' your'n wonna let thee stop a day longer anyhow, and that thou know'st. What's thine's mine, and what's mine's my own, and that's the law, and thou know'st it too!"

With a swelling at her heart which admitted of no words, Joan went in and fetched her dearly-earned savings; anything, she felt was, after all, cheap to get rid of him.

"Ye wunna tak' us away, Mark?" she said, making a last appeal as he turned to go. "Th' auld squire's widow have a been so uncommon kind to the childer, and Nelly gettin' on so nice at school, and Rowan a learnin' for to sew, when so be I can spare her. Let us bide a bit longer here—wunna ye now?"

"I hanna nowt to do wi' schools nor nothing—when I want ye, ye mun a' come, and as soon as I hears o' the day,

mind that. I wants the little un, and she's a gettin' rank spiled here. There; if that there Mercy ain't a comin' back, and I can't abide the sight on her! Just ye say as I've got to go arter that load o' lime to Langdale," muttered Mark, as he hurried off.

"And what mischief has yon feller been a sayin' and a doin' of to ye? Why, if ye dunna look a'most as white as the tablecloth! He's a bad lot, is that Mark; I wish ye was shut on him!" said Mrs. Gaunt, with much emphasis, as she came in.

"He says as how we're to go off wi' him in no time," answered Joan, sadly. "If he'd a mossel o' heart left, he'd think a bit for the little un. 'Twill be the ruin on her."

"Heart! he haven't a got no heart at all, on'y a great big gizzard! That's how 'tis!" cried Mrs. Gaunt, energetically.

"You wouldna tak' the child and do for her awhile? Me an Rowan could shift for oursen. I'd pay ye, if I slaved the skin off o' my fingers, I would, you givin' o' me time," said Joan, looking up entreatingly into her cousin's face.

"What, feed, and clothe, and see to her! and she such a little contr'y thing, as you've used allus for to have her own way; and that answers yer back like anythink? Nay, Joan, I canna do o' thatens. And as for payin' o' me, you'll ha' a fine job to clothe yersen and Rowan wi' what Mark gies ye. And what washin' can ye tak' in, and you never bidin' a week in ony place? Its just nonsense talkin'. Lor!" she interrupted herself, "if there aynt them fish napkins not gone up to the Ha', as Mrs. Cook were so petticklar to have for dinner-time. You just run up wi' em, that's a good 'ooman." And Mrs. Gaunt turned away, glad to divert the conversation.

Joan left the house with a basketful of linen in despairing silence. As she climbed the steep path, she sat down for a moment, with her elbows on her knees, and her head in her hands, in the old attitude which she had quite lost the habit of in the active work of her present life. She was

ruminating miserably over her own and her children's wretched chances, when she was roused by old madam's voice.

"What's the matter, Joan, woman? Are you ill? Has anything happened?" said Mrs. Heron kindly, as she stood over her. She was slight, and delicate, and pale, while the deep widow's mourning which she had not quitted since her husband's death, gave her a much older look than her years.

"My master's ordered on us back to the boats," replied Joan, almost sternly, "and the little un 'll just be ruined. I'd axed Mercy for to let her stop a bit, and I'd ma' it good to her, but she says I canna yarn enow', and Mark would tak' a' what I got, and I doubt she tells true, but she might risk a bit for 's own flesh and blood."

"What! that nice little bright-eyed thing, who answers up so sharply at the school, and looks so merry, that would be a pity! I'll speak to Mercy myself about it. And if *you* can't pay she must just come to me till you can. I won't have that child ruined for any bargeman that ever was born," said old madam, cheeringly.

Joan was not much used to putting her thoughts into words; she had spoken to relieve her heart, but with no idea of asking for help; she now blushed up to the eyes, seized Mrs. Heron's hand with both hers, and wrung it as in a vice.

The old lady almost screamed with pain at the grip.

"You're squeezing my rings into my fingers, child! Never mind," she said, half laughing at herself, as she rubbed one little white thin hand with the other. "And so your husband wants you back again to the barge! Its a bad look out for women and children. I don't hear much good of him any way—would not he let you stop and earn your living here?"

Joan shook her head despairingly. "He says he'll ma' the place too hot to hold me if I offers to stop. He'd be like to kill me," she muttered, turning away.

She would have given a good deal if Mrs. Heron had pressed her into giving her further confidence, but her manner was almost haughty in its reticence, and the old lady was shy, and unwilling to press counsel where it seemed unwelcome.

"I hope little Nelly will grow up to be a comfort to you at last; she's a nice pretty thing. Children are a blessing from the Lord when they're good ones," she added. "But then they go away and marry, or you have to go away and leave room for them. Poor mothers!" she laughed rather sadly.

"May God A'mighty grant ye comfort o' yer own lad," said Joan in a low voice.

"Lawrence is a good boy to his mother, a very good son indeed. I don't know what I should have done in my great trouble if he hadn't come back to me, and soothed and comforted me. He's been almost like husband and son in one, a stay to my soul and a staff for my hands and my heart to lean on," said Mrs. Heron, half to herself, with glistening eyes and a quiver in her voice. Then a little ashamed of her emotion, she went on—"You'll tell Mercy there was not enough starch in Mr. Lawrence's shirts last time, and she'll oblige me by telling Willis whenever there's a button wanting—there was one off his sleeve this morning. Miss Kate Iredale's coming to us to-day, and those bright eyes of hers always see everything and through everything. I hope," she added to herself, "that they're not a trifle too sharp."

The two had reached the wicket gate at the bottom of the garden, with its yew hedges, where a flight of steps led up to the flagged terrace between two high piers, surmounted with great balls, flanked on each side by a bit of balustrade on which a peacock sat and sunned himself. The old grey house, with its steep gables and wide mullioned windows, was clad in a garment of green ivy and jessamine, mixed with Virginian creeper, flowing over the rest in a cataract of rich crimson and brown leaves.

The entrance had formerly been on that side, that the sitting rooms might have the advantage, as it seems to have been thought in such secluded places, of seeing whatever passed along the road, scanty as that pastime here could be. But the next generation had new views, and Lawrence "had made the house turn its back on itself," his mother declared. "I scarcely know my way about my own house," she sometimes said.

"There's the pony carriage come back with Kate, and I declare, Lawrence is there already to receive her! Good night, Joan," she said, with a hurried nod, as she made haste towards the entrance, where stood her son in a shooting coat and felt hat (then quite a new fashion), assisted by the old keeper, Douro, and a few inferior dogs and men, all helping to do the honours to a tall slight girl with bright auburn hair and a high colour, who jumped out of the pony chaise before her host could reach her, and ran up, with outstretched hands, towards Mrs. Heron, who, with her nervous manner and shy looks, was blushing like a girl, as she forced herself forward to give the proper welcome to her guest.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WIDOW'S SON.

THE weather had been cold, and wet, and blustering, but these, the last days of September, were lovely and still. The sweeps of trees which clung to the rocky hillsides below the old Hall, wherever there was an inch of footing, were beginning to turn, and it is wonderful to what a height they grow and how luxuriant is the foliage in so scanty a soil. Brilliant tongues of fiery colour were coming out on the tall beech, wonderful harmonies of the red brown of the bracken on the open hillside, the yellow of the maple and

the birch, with a touch of crimson and scarlet in the mountain ash and wild guelder rose. The sun shone with a warm, gentle glow, though it only just rose above the high craggy walls of the mountain glen; a delicate blue haze lay on the slope below the light, while the Hall and its woods seemed to bask in the delicious warmth. The light caught on the white tors and points of rock which rose out of the shaggy clothing of trees, and on the rapid gleaming river below, sometimes lying in shallow pools, peaceful and bright, then dashing among the moss-green stones in small cascades and whirlpools. The water was still of a deep rich chocolate, for the rains of the previous week had brought down the peat from the moors above, where the streams had their birth, and the overhanging boughs of broad-leaved sycamore and wych elm dipped deep in the flood tide, and recovered themselves slowly with elastic motion, only to be swept on again.

In the wider dale below, the rocky walls and steep slopes left a scanty margin for a few small enclosed crofts and patches of bright green limestone grass, but the upper part of the dale, above the house, was very solitary, for a great obstructing and projecting shoulder of rock, standing out into the valley, had forced the road, which elsewhere followed closely the line of the stream, high up and across the hill. In those days, road makers went round an obstacle instead of blasting it away.


A tall pointed tor stood like a sentinel guarding the pass, and under its shadow lay the Grey Pool, a quiet retreat where the trout and grayling loved to lurk, and very strictly preserved. The cliffs on one side rose sheer out of its usually bright clear water, which, shewing the grey rocks beneath and reflecting those above, had given it its name. The tors were clad with close-fitting garments of the small creeping ivy, and generally topped with dark crowns of wind-blown old yew-trees; the steep slopes between them were feathered with rare mountain flowers in spring, burnet-leaved roses, lilies of the valley, herb-paris, with a

growth of juniper and raspberry. The service and wild guelder roses were now touched with brilliant hues, while the river banks were almost hidden by enormous leaves of the mountain coltsfoot, which in that congenial climate and soil grow sometimes six feet high, with an exuberant width of green umbrella at top, often three feet across, making a miniature forest.

Beyond came a natural weir of rock, over which the waters broke into a noisy flashing rapid, full of eddies and leaps, foaming, rushing, plunging, glancing round and over the masses of limestone which had fallen from above when the course of the deep valley had been rent asunder in some ancient cataclysm. It swept past with a giddy rapidity, forcing a passage between the obstacles wherever it was possible, dancing over them where it was not, headlong, vehement, excited, glorious in its swiftness and strength, and seeming to exult in its glad course.

The waters had always seemed living to Lawrence Heron, as the boy lay beside them for hours, dreamily fishing, or studying the bottom practically as he waded and scrambled with his rod and landing net, winning or losing the wary trout, watching the line of light of the green-blue kingfisher, or, when the otter made its delicate plunge, scarcely disturbing an inch of water as it dived, listening to the wild cry of the divers and coots, with the sweet scent of the woodruff and the mountain thyme wherever he trod, taking in nature at every sense, which is the great charm of the day's work to the real sportsman, from old Izaak Walton, who may have fished in these very waters, upwards and downwards in the years of the world.

The boy's quick observation and instinct of cause and effect would have been invaluable to a scientific naturalist. He had learnt the flight and the note of every bird, and the haunts and habits of every small beast that inhabited the steep mountain sides, the heathery crowns of the hills, the streams, and the trees, as he sat for hours on the branch of the great wych elm which overhung the pool, or wandered



with old Will Ratcliffe over the boggy bits after a snipe, or the occasional black game to be found on the moor above, ferreting the conies in the hollows among the rocks, or stalking a wild duck in the snow and the frost. The keeper, when such business was on hand, was grave and silent, keenly conscious of every movement of fish, flesh, and fowl, but rarely trusting his observations into words, a nudge or a point with his finger sufficing for all human intercourse, while his dogs obeyed even still more reconдите telegraphic signs.

There was generally a fresh pet for the boy whenever he came home from school. "See thee here, Master Lawrence, here's summat thee'll like," was the ordinary formula, as the old man put four baby otters, as playful as kittens, like little balls of fur, into the boy's arms, to his unspeakable joy. Another time a young owl awaited his arrival, with blinking round eyes and a frilly cap of white feathers, "all over like my grandmother's"; the next year, a squirrel that had tumbled out of its nest, and was brought up by hand, ran up his legs and arms to perch upon his head, where it sat whisking its tail. A windover hawk, saved out of a trap, with a very uncertain temper, and a beak of fear which it well knew how to use; or a hatching of wild ducks brought up by a hen; or a little fox, as wily and full of tricks almost before it could run as an infant Mercury, succeeded each other in his affections. The otters burrowed their way out of the enclosure where they were kept, and escaped to the river; the white owl choked itself with a mouse too hastily swallowed; the wild ducks flew away; the squirrel was worried by a dog; the falcon, mangy and woebegone, lost his beauty, though not his sharp temper, in captivity; the fox took to bad ways among Mrs. Heron's chickens, and had to be ignominiously slain; yet still the boy welcomed each new friend with a rapturous delight which no catastrophes could damp or chill.

He was an only child, and his life at home had been a solitary one, with an invalid father, to whom his mother's

time was entirely devoted. Colonel Heron had gone safely through the battles of the Peninsula, which were then dignified by the name of "the War," and supposed to have for ever pacified Europe. How many other final struggles have now attained that melancholy pre-eminence, and how many more are yet to come before that good end is reached ! In almost the last fire of the last engagement he had received a blow, more than a wound, from a spent ball on the side of the neck, which condemned him to a state of suffering from neuralgia and depression during the remainder of his life. His wife hardly ever left his side ; she drove with him, she walked with him, she read to him in the closed and darkened room, with scarcely a ray of light through the shutter by day, or from the shaded candle at night, or sat for silent hours in patient companionship of the pain she could not alleviate, but whose misery she chose at least to share. Fond as she was of her boy, she could do little actively for his amusement, and he had few companions during the holidays except an occasional school-fellow when Colonel Heron was a little better and could bear the idea of additional noise in the house, or when a neighbour's son came up to share the glories of an attack on a hornet's nest, or any other grand function of the woods ; but the lad was perfectly happy in his solitary rambles, or in the company of the old keeper, with whom his mother trusted him with implicit confidence. There were many imperfect things in the old feudal relations which are so quickly passing away, but the intercourse between master and man, between mistress and maid, in the old days, the disinterested affectionate relation between them, the protection of the property and of the children of the family by those below, the recognition of their claims by the chiefs, are a real loss to the world, ill exchanged for the "cash nexus," the "I wish to better myself" of modern servants, and the manner in which one living tool is exchanged for another in a London house, with scarcely more feeling by the employers than for a broken jug or the

replacing of one armchair by another. The coachman at Roland's Hill had been there from a boy; the housemaid was completing her fortieth year in her place. Three servants had died in the house after long illnesses, as carefully nursed and attended to as their masters. It was a family, a household, not a congeries of independent atoms, with no tie between them but the accident of being within the same four walls, and of the passing of a certain number of pounds between the contracting parties.

With no one about the place was the old feeling stronger than with the keeper. Lawrence was the pride and delight of the childless man, who loved the boy as if he had been his own, and gloried in his achievements as if he had been the King's son. His wife was dead, and he spent the chief part of his spare time with his sister Mercy, who was of much coarser, harder grain; but she, too, had been helping about the great house all her days, and identified herself with its inmates, though in her case it was more for her own glorification than for their service.

Lawrence had just left college, and was preparing to go abroad, when he was summoned home by his father's last illness and death—sudden at the last, as the end always appears to be in such long protracted illnesses. And now he himself had come into possession of the old Hall, with its beautiful woods and streams, and rough hillsides and tall cliffs, and, above all, with his young power of enjoyment. Nothing had been done on the property for years. During the long incapacity of its owner the affairs of the estate were a good deal involved, and it was some time before the young heir could get matters into any order or find leisure or money for pleasuring.

The first use, however, he made of his liberty was to carry out his long hoped for journey. The Continent had been closed for years, and the "grand tour" was not so common a thing in those days as in the time of Evelyn, nearly two centuries before, when, indeed, no young gentleman was held to have completed his education without

having sailed in a gondola at Venice, or danced a coranto at Naples. And now, at six and twenty, he had just returned to take up his final abode at home, to the delight of his mother, who had watched and waited during the many months of his absence, half proud and half miserable, living on his letters as the chief event of each week. In her extremely secluded existence her whole soul had been wrapt up in the passionate affection which she had borne to her husband, and which was now centred in her son.

That bright September morning Lawrence had sauntered down to sit as of old by the Grey Pool in the lovely stillness of the autumn day. He enjoyed it all, but it was with a difference. Everything looked so much smaller to him than in his boyhood; the cliffs that used to seem so huge that they brushed against the sky, had somehow shrunk; a pebbly reach in the river, where he used to bathe with rather a feeling of awe at its profound depth, now appeared so shallow that he wondered if the water would cover him. As he sat on his beloved stone, held as in a claw by the roots of the old twisted wych elm, he could see the line of bubbles where his old acquaintances the water rats (much pleasanter, cleaner little beasts than their land relations) were swimming below the surface to the hole of their nest below the level of the water, but it was without the enthusiasm of his former friendship for them; the gyrating little beetles in the back water of the bay, behind the old tree, were dancing as merrily as ever, the whistle of the water ouzel, the music of the roar of the stream, all bore with them pleasant echoes of the old time, but he was no longer "full-filled" with them—the phase in his life was passed when they haunted him like a passion

" That had no need of a remoter charm
By thought supplied, or any interest
Unborrowed from the eye."

He had lived more with men and with the thoughts born of men and their actions, instead of with nature, during the

past year ; and he now wanted a more human interest in his life than was afforded by the most cheerful of beetles. Even the sunshine which was shining through the tracery of leaves and boughs, and gleaming on the river, was not quite perfect without some one to whom he could say how beautiful it was !

He was glad when he was interrupted by old Will, who had been hanging lovingly on his very footsteps, and when Douro thrust his cold nose between his knees and looked up into his face, as if he too were inviting his master to that "pretty bit o' sport wi' the conies on the Black Hill," and he went off with them willingly. In a short time, however, much to the disgust of dogs and men, he had broken away, before it ought by rights in their eyes to have been half over, to hasten home in time to receive Miss Iredale.

CHAPTER V.

PREPARATIONS FOR WAR.

THE column of pale blue smoke rose perpendicularly in the still air from the Robin Hood cottage as Joan came down the steep path from the Hall. She found Mercy on the little terrace before the house, stirring up the dirty clothes energetically in the great tub with a "dolly," a north country invention with three legs, which had preceded the American washing machine by a century or two at the very least.

She listened to the account of Mrs. Heron's good intentions for Nelly in ungracious silence for so long that Joan's heart sank within her at the thought of losing the good chance for the child, but at last Mrs. Gaunt, on due consideration, relented. "Well, I mun humour the Missus, I s'pose, as she've a took that maggot intil her head ! I

winna stand in the little lass's way, sin' Madam ha' set her fancy that way, and ye may e'en leave her here," she said, rather grudgingly.

Nelly stood by and listened while her fate was thus discussed, and then began to compose a little garden in a plate, carefully combining leaves of the bramble and herb-robert (which change in that climate to the most vivid scarlet and geranium colour), with little pincushions of bright green moss chosen in the wood on her road from school. She had just finished her beautiful bit of colour when old Ratcliffe and his dog appeared from among the trees which came close up to the house.

"Why, what'll mak' ye so early, Will?" said his sister; I seen ye and the young Measter pass after mid-day, and heerd ye shootin' above the Briery Bed but now. Are ye back already?"

"The young Measter is na sa keen, not by no means, arter the conies nor nothin' to day, and seemingly he wanted to get home," said Will, evasively.

"He and yu was at the door when Miss Iredale come, for I seen ye," said Nelly sharply, "as I come round by th' Ha'."

"Oh! that were how the wind's a blowin'," observed Mercy, shrewdly.

"See thee, Will—"

"Ye should na be so pert, Nelly," interrupted her mother.

"Them flowers is for Madam Heron's winder," proceeded Nelly, without heeding her, but sidling up with her plateful of beauty to her old crony and patron as he sat down in the deep window-seat and began to clean his gun. "I'm a goin' for to stop here, ain't you glad, Will?" went on the child, cheerfully. "Madam says I'm too nice for to go along wi' them ugly black barges any more, and she'll do for me here, and gi'e me red cloaks and a'!"

Her mother's heart ached as she heard her, while she

stood by nominally heating an iron. She had been doing her best to make the child glad to stay, yet she could not help inconsistently wishing that Nelly should feel a little more of the pain at parting which was now wrenching her own heart.

"Well, Madam *will* be fine and pleased, for sure! She sets great store by flowers and them things; and thee must be a good little mayd to her as is so good to thee. Thee munna talk so o' bein' nice, 'tis hur as is nice!" moralised the old man.

"I've dot a bit o' game, Uncle Will, on'y think! 'Tis a mouse as has a bin atin' the cheese, and I'm a goin' to roast it upo' th' hob. You shall ha' some too, for 'twill taste beautiful!"

"'Twill be as good as good, and no doubt o' that," replied he, with proper gravity, "but I shanna git a very big bit, I'm thinkin'."

"I wonder whether mice has thinkin's, Uncle Will, and whether they likes bein' aten or no?" observed Nelly, thoughtfully, as she began her culinary operations.

"Well, I mun be thinkin' o' goin', anyhow," declared Will, feeling hardly up to this metaphysical disquisition. "There's lots to do to-night, wi' to-morro' the first o' th' pheasant shootin', and sich a big lot o' folk a comin' to the Ha'. Mr. Lawrence, he would be just mad angry an the birds was took the very night afore they was wanted, he would, and this his first shootin' party sin' he come home from furrin parts. For a' he's got a fine temper of's own, I will say that for 'm!"

"Is it them nice little brown speckildy things as ye brought up under the hens i' th' summer, Uncle Will—what I used to help ye for to feed? You put nine on 'em into your pocket one day, I mind, when ye was a movin' the coops up to a fresh place, but they've grow'd a good bit by now," said Nelly, with great interest.

"And them's what they poachers calls wild fowl, they do! wi' no end o' th' barley meal and the corn as they eats



afore they're started, and ants' eggs for the partridges, and watchin' 'em by day, wi' the foxes and the hawks, and me up at nights, and heaven knows the trouble. It's a pretty oke, that is! I've heerd a noise as there's mischief in the wind, and for to-night, they says, but we've pretty nigh half a score o' watchers out, up and down, for to circumwent 'im, and yu may let your bad lot o' a husband know that!" ended the keeper, turning to Joan, who was now preparing the iron griddle for some circular flat plates of fresh oat-cake, a dainty which looks and tastes uncommonly like tough brown leather for those not to the manner born of the country fare.

"Mark's safe this turn, anyhow," answered she, a little sullenly, and colouring as she spoke; "he's gone to Langdale arter a load o' lime for the barge, and come up for to say we mun be off to-morrow, or next day wi'out fail, or his measter will tak' away the boat, as is his livin'."

"More better for he, then, to be clear out o' th' way o' temptation, that's a' I've got to say!" said Will, preparing slowly to be gone, and standing looking out at the night.

"I'll not ha' ye go, Will, till I gie ye yer tea and a bit o' hot cake for yer supper; ye're not so young, by no means, as ye was for to go wi'out yer vittles!" cried his sister, hurrying about after her tea things.

"Fifty year, man and boy, I've a bin wi' them up at the Ha', and thirty on 'em full keeper, and helped bring up Mr. Lawrence, the young squire, as one should say by rights. He can throw a fly a'most as neat as I can mysen, and is a fine shot wi' a woodcock. As why not? for haven't I had the trainin' o' him ever sin' he could walk, so to speak?"

"And such a one for 's mother, to be sure," said Mrs. Gaunt, sitting down at the head of her table, and beginning to rattle the teacups with a certain importance befitting that honourable position. "So loving-like to her; and 'what'll my mother like, and how do she want it done?' says he, laughin' like, when he were axed the day he come home how he'd ha' the cheers set for dinner. I was there

and heerd him. I'm sure I thowt when th' auld Squire died, and she so ailin,' she'd niver overget it, and if she's upo' her feet again, 'tis because her heart is so set upo' Mr. Lawrence, I re'ly do believe. Once when I were helping nurse up at the big house, one night as she were very throng, she says to me, 'Mercy,' she says, 'I dunna know as ever I'——"

"Who telled ye as there were to be trouble i'th' woods to-night, Will?" enquired Nat, suddenly, interrupting his wife's flood of recollections which threatened to be lengthy. He had established himself at the little round table, and was supping up his tea with a loud snort of satisfaction. "Is there onything fresh afoot then as you knows on?"

"Eh, is thee grown earsore a' of a suddent? Dost thee think I be such a gawk as to tell thee who, nor where, nor what? No, not I, as I knows on, not thee nor noboddy else neither," answered the keeper severely. "But there, this I will say, d'ye mind one night twenty year, it may be, or more back (we was a bit younger then, we was), as yu and I was follerin' a pack of 'em stealin' up by the Badger's Cave, and that at top o' th' nol we'd a burst arter 'em across the moor, ten on 'em if there was a man! and old Ollerenshaw, as were keeper then, got a clout o' th' head wi' a stick from the biggest on 'em as made the sparks fly in his eyes—'twere like bein' i' th' smithy hittin' at a horse-shoe, he said,—and young Elliot had his arm bruck wi' another? I shouldn't much wonder if there won't be as many o' them varmint out to-night agen, and more, too, than there was yon time! There hasn't been pheasants enow bred sin' then, scarce, to make it worth their while for to stand the trick that fashion. So now we mun be off, Douro, old dog," he ended, turning to his companion.

Douro disengaged himself with wonderful expedition from Nelly's hands, who had been dressing him up in her own sun bonnet and second best cape, fondling and tormenting him to her heart's content in the corner of the room. Douro, however little to his taste were the antics

played with his head or his tail, never complained, but submitted with a good grace to the most fantastic tricks which his little tyrant could play on him, with a "it pleases she and it don't hurt me" air of magnanimity.

"He's the most wonderfulest good pious dog ever were, to be sure! let the other be whoever may be," went on Will, contemplating his shaggy friend with loving admiration, as he quietly got rid of his trappings as soon as business was on hand, and using the word, no doubt, after the manner of Virgil, describing the pious Eneas, *i.e.*, probably doing what was right under the circumstances, virtuous, fulfilling his duties!

The still evening was settling down upon hill, and wood, and stream; the red and orange light shone over the bare and rocky summits, and a purplish haze darkened gradually over the deep valley, folding out one object after another under the soft covering veil of night as the old man and his companion went down into the woods to set his sentinels and prepare for his line of defence.

The weather, however, began to change as the night darkened, and there was a low sough of wind among the trees as Joan came in the last thing with an armful of linen.

"It's a goin' to be wet, I do believe; I've a got a sharp twinge o' that there rheumatics, and a deal o' sorrow down my backbone, and there's Will haven't niver a brought me that hare's foot for to wear in my pocket, as is the sovereign'st thing on earth agin 'em, everybody knows. He said he'd think on it scores o' times, and he niver minds, for a' he niver forgits nout for the little wench, he don't," said Mrs. Gaunt in a somewhat aggrieved tone. "You'd best just fetch in the rest o' them things from the orchard; they'd as well not be out in a storm."

Joan went out again in silence; a mood of hopeless depression was stealing over her at the prospect of her dismal fate in the boat which she saw no chance of avoiding.

It was very dark, and the rain had begun to fall as she passed in and out among the apple trees, busily gathering the linen from the lines, when she saw a man slouching round the corner of a shed. It was only for a second, but she thought that she recognised Mark! What could he be doing here, when his work at the barge was so urgent? It was dark enough, however, for her to refuse the unpleasant evidence of her senses, or rather intuition. "He's down at Langdale after the lime—I know he mun be. It canna be him," she repeated to herself again and again.

CHAPTER VI.


BEFORE THE STORM.

"WE shall be two guns short to-morrow, mother, I'm sorry to say. Here's a note from Robert Falconer to say that he's ordered off to Ireland and can't be in two places at once; and his brother has sprained his ankle and can't come," said Lawrence Heron, coming into the Hall drawing room that evening, dressed for dinner. "We want every gun we can get, and we must give up shooting the Briery Bed, with the leaves still so thick on the trees, so that it's very provoking."

"I wondered that you had the shooting so early as the first," answered his mother.

"Old Ratcliffe's head was too doggedly full of the poachers this year to put it off. He was determined the pheasants should get into your larder instead of theirs, or I should not have thought of it."

He was speaking to his mother, but his eyes were on the recess of the deep bay window, where Kate Iredale stood talking to a young barrister, a college friend of his own who had just arrived; and Mrs. Heron, though she seemed to be



attending to the pheasant question, was anxiously watching his looks.

The girl's eyes were bright, her auburn hair was bright, and her tall slender figure in white, against the background of dark trees and sky seen through the unshuttered casement, seemed to concentrate all the light in the room round the particular place where she stood. Lawrence at length moved up to the pair, appearing to think that the *tête-à-tête* had lasted quite long enough.

"You will have to shoot for two at least, Palmer," said he. "Here is Robert Falconer failing us, and we shall be only five guns."

"We shall do very well, I've no doubt, without him," answered Palmer. "It's the prettiest bit of shooting in the county, I always say."

"And you will kill quite enough of the poor birds," observed Kate, smiling.

"I've seen you count the woodcock feathers round your brother's hat with great pride, Miss Kate, and they're 'poor birds,' all the same!"

"Ah! but that is when sharp wits like the woodcock's are pitted fairly against yours, and if you win it is an honour; but the pheasant is such a big and blundering fellow, and makes such a noise and fuss when he gets up, that there is no glory in hitting him!"

"But there is great shame in missing him! You should see old Ratcliffe's face if I let a bird pass. I remember how I used to blush up to my very ears, in an agony of shame, when in the old days I was a boy here. It was much worse than being sent up at Harrow," said Charles, with a wry face. He would have preferred his host's longer absence, but dinner was announced, and the young master of the house carried off his guest in triumph.

Dinner was early in those days, and six o'clock was even fashionably late, a concession, indeed, Mrs. Heron considered, to her son's new habits. The large, low dining room, with its dark red furniture, its great beams, and its

high black wainscot, above which was a row of old pictures, looked warm and comfortable, while the *partie carrée* in the middle of the room, isolated on its square of carpet on the polished oak floor, had a pleasant, quaint formality about it.

"How early the evenings are closing in; I shall be very sorry to begin dining by lamplight," said Mrs. Heron. "I believe that every year I think autumn is earlier than usual!"

"The poachers seem to have begun earlier than usual, at all events, this year," answered Palmer. "Hot and strong too. I was out shooting with Lord Sandby, in August, on the Black Moors, with four or five other guns, and ten or twelve keepers and beaters, when we were met by about fifty men, Sheffield operatives, all armed, in open daylight. Fighting was out of the question, so my lord laughed, and said, 'If you'll be good enough, gentlemen, to leave this side of the moor to us, and take to the other end, I shall be obliged to you. Good morning!'"

"We shall very soon have to give up preserving in the neighbourhood of the great towns altogether. And if the game laws go, as I think is very likely, there'll be a trespass law enacted as stringent as those in France and Italy, where you can't cross a field, and I don't think the British public will like that any better," said Lawrence.

"Coming the young magistrate and legislator over us, and a quite new broom!" whispered Charley in a loud aside to Kate.

"Sharpened by a distressing knowledge of 'furrin parts' over us poor islanders," answered she, smiling, and in the same tone.

"There's no positive crime in having been abroad," observed Lawrence, only half laughing.

"It's the basest envy on my part, I assure you, because I never have had the luck to go there myself," put in Kate.

"I'm sure I'm thankful that you got home safe, Law-

rence," said his mother a little plaintively. "I scarcely had a quiet night while you were away, for thinking of all the risks that you were running."

"One may come to grief, mother, quite as soon at home as abroad, for what I can see. You remember George Archer, at Harrow, Charley?—not the red haired one, the eldest; we used to call him 'peg-top.' He went half round the world, and never got so much as a scratch, and the week he reached home last winter he was drowned, skating on the pond in his own father's park, almost within sight of his poor mother's windows."

"Yes, I heard of that," answered Charley; "he was trying to save his brother, but they got out the boy all safe, while poor George was dead when they found him. Cramp, perhaps, with the chill, for he could swim like a fish."

"Poor mother!" murmured Mrs. Heron, half to herself. "I wonder how people live through such times!"

There was a painful pause.

"How is old Ratcliffe?" said Charles presently, almost at random, to help the conversation out of its solemn channel; "he must be in his glory now you are come home, Heron. He used to hold you up, to my intense disgust, I remember, as an incarnation of all the hunting virtues, and the whole duty of boy besides. I wonder I did not hate you!"

"He does not seem to me a bit older than he was before I went abroad, and Douro is quite well too, thank you—of course, you want to be informed as to *his* health; no one could think of enquiring about one without the other."

"I've always been rather afraid of Douro—he watches me so keenly—there's an uncanny look about him; I believe the soul of some former keeper has migrated into his body; there's something most humanly intelligent in his face."

"Do the humans of your acquaintance strike you as being so *very* intelligent in general, Mr. Palmer?" enquired Kate demurely. "I consider your comparison as a reflection on Douro!—but then, perhaps I have been bribed—he

received me when I arrived, with the greatest kindness and condescension! I can't say how flattered I felt that he had not forgotten me."

"How melancholy it is to note the declension of good manners in the present generation, Miss Kate!" said Charles with a very bad imitation of a sigh. "Lawrence's grandfather up there on the wall would have pressed his cocked hat to his breast after such a speech as that, and murmured, 'How could you suspect even a dog, who had once known you, of forgetting?' It is detestable to see good opportunities wasted in this way."

"Nobody will ever accuse you of wasting *your* opportunities, Charley, at least as far as the gift of the gab goes!"

"I wish the solicitors were of your opinion, Heron, if only Miss Kate were a solicitor!"

"Thank you so much for your kind wishes, Mr. Palmer," said she, bowing.

"With the high idea I know she entertains of my talents and virtues!"

"How delightful it is to hear one's inmost thoughts translated with such unerring accuracy by the subject himself!" said she.

"You'd better keep your unerring accuracy for the birds to-morrow, Charley, or the jury next week; it will be all wanted!"

"I hope you'll have as fine weather to-morrow as we have had to-day," put in Mrs. Heron, a little puzzled at the chaff, and not quite sure whether they were not quarrelling; "the soft light and the calm sunshine on the river, and down the valley, have been lovely. I don't think I was ever out on a more exquisite afternoon."

"And a fine autumn day in your hills is a thing to be remembered, the colours are so vivid," replied Charles. "I suppose the leaves dry quickly on the trees in this shallow soil among these rocks, and are bright longer before they fall. But the valley looks gorgeous."

"They are wonderfully brilliant this year certainly; I thought I had never seen the world look so beautiful as we drove up the dale to-day," said Kate enthusiastically."

Lawrence looked at her gratefully.

"Somebody said that the glass was going down at a great pace, however, to-night, and where will all your beauty be then?" moralised Charles.

"I hate prophets of evil," cried Kate energetically, "sufficient for the day is the sunshine thereof! The dead leaves can bury their dead quite sadly enough when the time comes; don't you think so, Mrs. Heron?"

"You look a little tired, dear mother," observed Lawrence, turning to her, "I hope you have not over walked yourself to-day."

"I'm afraid that you gave up the pony carriage to send it for me; I am so very sorry," cried Kate, with much compunction.

"No, my dear," replied Mrs. Heron earnestly, "I had a sick body to look after in a cottage quite off any road, and I came home by the Grey Pool, which is always a pleasure to me. Lawrence has been so fond of it ever since he was a little lad," and she smiled as she looked at the tall, strong fellow, opposite her.

"Ratcliffe is in great wrath at having lost several of his best trout there lately. There's a certain Mark Ogden, a navvy, who's been prowling round these last weeks, but he can't bring anything home to him yet. 'He's as wary as a weasel and as strong as a red deer,' he says, but we shall nab him at last, I suppose. He is husband to that Joan who works at your laundry, mother, but he lives about, they say, nobody knows where."

"Poor woman, she's in sad trouble, he's taking her away to the boats to-morrow, so there'll be an end at least to his poaching. That was his pretty little girl standing before the door when you came in, Kate."

But Kate had been too busy on her arrival to take notice of any pretty little girls.

Mrs. Heron had sat on, somewhat bewildered by the youth and spirits of her guests after her long seclusion, and not quite sure whether she was amused or not, or whether she liked the sensation ; but at length she rose to go, and both Lawrence and Charles rushed to open the door, like a couple of boys as they still were.

"I hope you observe how I am polishing up Heron's manners, Miss Kate, and give me credit accordingly."

"Good wine needs no bush, Mr. Palmer," answered she with a deep curtsy, while he was searching for her fan under the table. "I'm trying if I can come up to your standard of manners, but it is quite impossible. My grandmother used to sink almost into the floor and rise again slowly and majestically in the same place, not like my untidy sweep. I am sure Mrs. Heron would do it beautifully, if only she chose," said she, affectionately, as she slid her hand within her hostess's arm.

"No, no, my dear," said Mrs. Heron, in her hurried shy way, "my curtseying days are over, and most other days too," she said, half aloud to herself.

"Surely some of the best are left now that Mr. Heron has come back to you," said Kate, when they entered the drawing room out of the reach of other ears.

The ladies had scarcely left the room, when the old white-headed butler put his head in again at the door—"Will Ratcliffe is here wanting to speak to you, Mr. Lawrence." He had not yet lost the habit of using the Christian name of his master.

The two young men followed him into the old dark hall, with its heavy oak beams supported by brackets. The walls were furnished with stags' antlers, from which hung queer caps and cloaks, sticks of every shape and size ; some old armour, a rapier or two, a stuffed bustard, and some crested cranes shot in the hills, stood about on the black cabinets, with tall china jars, and Lawrence's new importations of Italian vases and marble tables. Some badger and other

skin rugs lay on the ground amid all the usual pell mell of an old English Hall.

The light fell on the old man's grey head and rugged weather-beaten face, as he looked up eagerly.

"I'd be glad if you could spare a man or two from the house, if you please, Mr. Lawrence; they say there'll be a many on 'em out to-night, and it's best to be on the safe side for numbers."

"I shall come, of course," answered the young squire.

"And I, too," added Palmer eagerly.

"Who else would like to go, Morris, do you think? Really like it I mean, or we wouldn't have them."

"There's the groom and George footman, sir, as would be very fain to see the fun."

At that moment the drawing room door opened for the tea tray, and Mrs. Heron hearing the unusual bustle and the sound of her son's voice, came out into the hall and caught the last sentences.

"Lawrence, you are not serious! What signifies all the birds in the world in comparison to your risk? Let them have every pheasant on the estate and welcome, rather than that you should go after the poachers in this way," said she, anxiously, laying her hand on his arm.

"But, mother, there is not a pennyworth of risk. We're going out with old Ratcliffe, whom you've trusted me with ever since I was in petticoats!" replied Lawrence, a little impatiently. "And if you wish for more, here's Charley Palmer, head of the eleven at Harrow, going too, better than any two of the poachers I'll undertake to say, and there are five of the watchers—what could you want better?"

"And John groom, and George footman," added Morris, importantly, putting forward his own contribution to the expedition.

"How could you come and lure him into danger, Ratcliffe?" said Mrs. Heron, turning reproachfully to him.

"I thought no harm, Missis," apologised the keeper

anxiously, "on'y as Mr. Lawrence might like the bit o' sport maybe."

"You wouldn't have me send other men, and not have the pluck to go myself, mother?" inquired Lawrence in rather an annoyed tone.

"Then send all the men away, and let the poachers take as many birds as they like!" cried Mrs. Heron passionately.

"Not very encouraging for the keepers, and not exactly the thing for a magistrate," laughed Lawrence, half vexed.

"Nor for a future judge of his Majesty's Court of Common Pleas," cried Palmer, who was longing to go. "Mrs. Heron, I promise to keep close to his elbow, and knock down the first man that touches him!"

"Come in, dear mother," said Lawrence kindly, as he kissed her and led her back into the drawing room; "we'll promise to take care and get into no mischief, and you must promise me you'll try and keep quiet about us at home."

"Why don't you speak, Kate? He might perhaps listen to you," groaned Mrs. Heron.

"If Mr. Heron thought it right not to go," hesitated Kate—

"But he thinks just the contrary," cried Lawrence. "You'll manage to keep my mother as cheerful as you can I know, Kate, and prove to her that it was quite impossible I could stay behind. I'm sorry to lose your first evening here though," he added in a low voice, taking hold of her hand. "We shall be back in a very short time, I dare say, and want our tea and some music. Where are my shooting things, Morris? Here's a good thick stick for you Palmer. Where can mine, with the root head, have got to, I wonder?"

There were a few minutes more of confusion and bustle, and they were all off.

The night had overclouded, and though the moon was full her light was dim, as the little party went rapidly along up the steep hillside in the direction where one of the

watchers had heard a shot not half an hour before. There was a lift in the clouds, and they could see pretty plainly before them, but though they crossed and re-crossed the covert there was nothing to be found. It was rather a blank.

"I do b'lieve as it were all a blind for to draw us off out here fur away!" cried Ratcliffe, indignantly, when another gun was heard in an exactly opposite direction. "How could ye be took in so?" he said, angrily, to the watcher. His foot struck, as he spoke, against a dead pheasant which had fallen in the path.

"They've a been here, anyhow, not long back," said the man. "There mun be a many on 'em out to-night."

The wind was now rising, and there were gusts of rain in their faces as they hurried back through the woods to the other side of the house.

"Keep together—mind you all keep together!" reiterated old Ratcliffe, as they all rushed on under the trees, where the great stones and the deep, prickly, low brushwood made it almost impossible for them to obey. Presently a fresh report was heard not a quarter of a mile away.

"Firin' at 'em as they roostes, what ayn't fair!" cried the sporting groom indignantly, under his breath.

Another and another shot succeeded quickly, guiding them to the spot where ten or twelve men, their faces blackened, were firing rapidly at the pheasants in the trees, and apparently meaning to hold their ground.

They were pretty equally matched, however; there were ten of their own party, and they closed on the enemy. One of the poachers took deliberate aim, and the shot grazed Ratcliffe's ear, but as the assailants gradually made out the number of their opponents they began to retire, at first in good order.

"After 'em! yon's the rascal that fired!" shouted the old keeper furiously, as pell-mell, poachers, watchers, and master, they all plunged in different directions among the big stones, the heather, and the brambles; the great trees darkening overhead.

Lawrence was in front, having singled out the foremost of the party—a tall, strong fellow, with a blackened face like the rest. He almost had his hand upon the man as he dodged round the massive trunk of a beech, and again, if his foot had not slipped, as he followed him scrambling over a mossy bit of rock. Down, down they both went at full speed; but as they got lower in the valley the wood became still more dark, and the moon's light fainter. It was only by knowing every inch of the ground by heart that Lawrence could keep his footing at all, or manage not to lose sight of his enemy. As it was, he fell on his hands and knees more than once. His wind, however, was better than that of his adversary; he was gaining on him, and when he reached the bottom of the glen the man was at bay, out of breath, and with the river behind him.

"You'd better give yourself up," panted Lawrence with his hand on the fellow's collar, "the water's too high to cross."

But it was no child's play he had undertaken; the poacher turned and wrenched himself out of the grasp upon him; there was a hand to hand struggle; both were powerful athletic men in the prime of life, although Lawrence was slighter made. For a few moments it seemed uncertain which would have the mastery, then one came heavily to the ground, and there was the dull thud of some heavy weapon falling upon flesh and blood.

CHAPTER VII.

SUSPENSE.

"THEY'VE not come back," moaned Mrs. Heron, "and it's nearly four hours since they've been gone!" She had refused to be comforted, and had sat for long, silent and sad, scarcely noticing or even perceiving Kate's efforts to interest and amuse her. But as it grew later, she insisted

on having the window open, cold and rainy though it had become. She sat gazing out into the dark night, the dull moonlight making all without look weird and ghastly, and wincing at every shout and shot which rang through the valley and the steep woods. For some time the sounds seemed to be almost close to the house, but gradually they grew farther and fainter, and then quite ceased, warded off by a shoulder of the hill. Still she waited on, but no one appeared, and the scouts from the house whom she sent out either did not come back at all or brought no news. All was silent as the grave, excepting the pattering of the rain-drops on the leaves, for it had begun to pour heavily.

She was now walking ceaselessly up and down the room.

"They could hardly be back yet; you could not expect them before this," Kate tried to say, but she had become infected with Mrs. Heron's anxiety, and her own heart began to sink within her at the long delay, and what it might portend.

"I can't stop any longer here, I must go out and try to see for myself where he is," said the poor woman at last, shaking all over, and in spite of all remonstrances she was wrapping a great shawl round her head, and gathering her black garments round her, when the door opened, and Charles Palmer came slowly in with a face as white as a sheet.

Mrs. Heron shuddered. "Tell it me, tell me quickly, what has happened? He's dead! I know he's dead!" she said in a hoarse whisper.

"We can't find him, we know nothing," answered Charles, his eyes full of tears. "We parted in the wood."

"And you swore that you would keep by him!" muttered the poor woman, goaded by her anguish.

"It was all done in a second," he replied gently; "he was off like a shot after the man who had fired at Ratcliffe, and seemed like the leader. The wood was so thick that nobody could keep alongside anybody, and the men on both sides scattered like chaff. Ratcliffe caught one of them,

but he made his escape after all, and which way Lawrence went no one could tell in the *mêlée*. It's much too dark to find footsteps, but they've got lanterns now, and we're all on the search. Ratcliffe begged me to come back to you; we thought anything better to bear than suspense like this. But I'm going again directly to join them. Only, till daylight we mustn't reckon on finding out anything."

The stable clock struck twelve in the yard as he spoke.

"Five hours before daybreak!" moaned the poor mother, wringing her hands—"five hours! God help me! And I was asking how one lived through such times such a little while ago, as if it had been in a story book!" Then, after a pause, she asked passionately, "And there hasn't been a single sound all the time in answer to your shouts?"

"None," answered Palmer, reluctantly.

"Let me go, let me go, I must go and look after him myself. I could find him, I'm quite sure that I could find him!" cried Mrs. Heron, almost forcing her way to the door out of the detaining hands of the two.

"What could you do, dear, out in the great woods, and in this pouring rain?" entreated Kate, earnestly.

"All the men about the place are doing everything that can be done, working their very hearts out, I assure you, Mrs. Heron. I promise you that we won't stop till we find him—somehow," said Palmer, commiseratingly.

Mrs. Heron winced at the word.

"He may have swooned, and then he would not hear the shouts," cried Kate, eagerly.

"Yes, he might have fainted," repeated the mother.

"Wait, dear, wait, you know that *he* never would have allowed you to go out in such a night as this," whispered Kate tenderly, who had her own burden to bear, as Mrs. Heron could hear dimly in the tone of her voice. And at the thought of what might have been, and at the recollection of her son's tender care for her, a flood of tears came at last as a relief to the poor woman; she threw herself down

on the sofa and hid her face in the cushions. They could hear the low murmurs of her passionate prayers, unconscious that anyone was present in the absorption of her misery. "And then she lay and spoke not, but He heard in heaven." The nervous tension was over, at least for the moment, and she lay still under the blow.

As Palmer left the room, with its blaze of light and colour, the bright fire (which the mother had had lighted—"You know he'll come in wet and tired," she had said)—the flowers, the bits of art treasures collected by Lawrence in his travels, and the beautiful girl hovering over the dark figure lying heaped together on the sofa; and then went out into the dark rainy night, where in some unknown corner, amidst the mire, the cold darkness, and the dank leaves, the object of those loving hearts and the master of the place might be lying—his heart sank within him.

CHAPTER VIII.

FOUND.

THE day broke grey and gloomy, with fitful storms of wind and rain, as the weary seekers came out of old Will's cottage at the top of the glen, where they had taken refuge for an hour or two after their fruitless search of so many hours.

"We mun just hark back," said the old man sadly, as he looked out from under his grizzled eyebrows into the half light now slowly growing over the tops of the bare upland moors. "We've tried every way forrard where they was last seen. Most like that there fellow doubled back like a fox."

They turned down from the wild and lonely summits of the hills into the thick brushwood, where in the shelter of the narrow dale the trees feathered down a great shoulder

of hill, ending in a perpendicular cliff over the rapid river, where lay the Grey Pool. The banks of the glen were so steep that it was hardly a likely line for a fugitive to take, but when they sighted the tall pinnacle of rock rising out of its nests of fern, they could see, in the early morning light, the giant coltsfoot leaves below trampled and torn as if a sharp struggle had taken place, close to the dark angry waters at its base, which whirled round the rocks in a turbid flood, checked only by the weir of stones below.

"Lookee there, lookee there! What's yon?" gasped old Will hoarsely, peering anxiously through the white mist and the shadows that still lingered in the deep valley. "There, there! He's alive surely!"

There was a dreadful something moving in the back-water of the stream, formed by a shattered trunk whirled down by the torrent from above, and the ceaseless play of the waves gave it a dismal appearance of life as it rose and fell with the eddies of the stream. They all rushed down and dragged poor Lawrence's body to the shore, where the old keeper took it in his arms and carried it up the bank as tenderly as if it had been an infant's, stroking the white face as he laid down his burden—life, however, had been long extinct. Whether the young man had been flung into the waters still alive, or whether he had been killed on the spot by a blow he had received on the head, the blood from which stained his clothes, there was none to bear witness. The night's heavy rain rendered it impossible to identify the footsteps in the sodden ground ploughed up by the storm, and the river had risen so high that all traces of the way in which the doer of the deed had escaped were obliterated among the long, dank, dripping grass and underwood.

The high road, however, ran over the hill at no very great distance on the other side of the tor, and deep as was the flood it was perfectly possible for an active man, in danger of his life, to cross the river at more than one point, before it had risen to its highest, earlier in the evening.

"There were a horse and cart heerd gallopin' along the

road, as 'twere the Devil hissen drivin'. Clatterin' past like mad they went, hard by the Pig and Whistle, Buggat's inn, ye know. Auld Tommy Goodall he says his son telled him so."

"Ready for that lot o' pheasants they've a took off wi' 'em," said another in a low voice. "'Taynt no ways hard for ony man to've got away that fashion, let alone that Mark, as is like an otter i'th' watter."

Ratcliffe was silent as he searched intently up and down for any trace of steps or relics of the struggle, but nothing was to be found except Lawrence's own stick. He and his assailant had been entirely apart from the rest of the party. The main body of pursued and pursuers had rushed up the valley in a completely different direction, and the old man turned away with a deep sigh, when even his wary insight and close observation of wood lore were at fault, and not a clue could be discovered of any kind.

"I'm sure that Mark had a hand in't anyhow," he muttered.

"That's not evidence," replied Charles Palmer a little sharply. He was worn out, and cross with fatigue and excitement.

The old man was too bewildered and miserable to reply as they slowly mounted the hill with their dismal burden.

"Turn in at the back door! Where on earth are you going, Ratcliffe?" cried Palmer, as they mechanically took the nearest way, and came up the garden side of the house; but Mrs. Heron, watching at the window, had already seen the melancholy procession from above, and they could hear her wailing cry. No concealment was possible as they carried the young master for the last time into his home, to his mother's side, who met him at his own door.

There was little except the keeper's which could be called evidence forthcoming at the inquest, which was held at the Hall that morning, but Mark's name was in everybody's mouth. He had been hanging loose up and down the country for the last few weeks, in company with all the

"bad uns," the wild chaps about, and was known to be the most daring among them; but he had not been seen near the place that evening, except by his poor wife, and, indeed, was supposed to have been down at the limekiln miles away, while the poachers were believed to be an organised gang from a distance.

The verdict was an open one; but the blow on poor Lawrence's head was declared by the surgeon to have been probably given by the butt end of a gun. It had clearly been no case of theft, for both watch and purse were found on the body.


When all was over, Ratcliffe, haggard with fatigue and want of sleep, with bloodshot eyes, muddy and woebegone, came limping painfully into his sister's house. He seemed suddenly to have become an old man, as he sat solemnly down in the great armchair, and burst into such a violence of dry sobs as frightened Mercy almost more even than it did the children and Joan, who stood by awestricken at his grief.

"Ye munna tak' on like that," repeated his sister, her eyes streaming. "Why, it's like for to kill ye! And what's the use now he's gone? 'Twere the Lord's will for to tak' him, and ye canna do nowt."

But the commonplaces fell unheeded on the old man's ears; he scarcely seemed to know that she was speaking.

"And I that has a held him upo' my knees ever sin' he were a little un, and learned him wi' his first fly! And shot so straight, and would ha' kept the auld place together so right and a'! And me to be left, an old, useless, withered stump, and the young strong tree tuk away! And to think as 'twere me persuaded of him to go last night to's hurt and to's death! and however shall I meet Madam?" And he broke down again.

"These things munna be thowt on after this fashion, else 'twill mak' ye mad," repeated Mercy. "And as for poor Madam, ye won't meet her in a hurry; she've just a shut hersen up i'th' dark, they says, and wonna see noboddy



nor speak to noboddy sin' th' body's been found, but just walks up and down, up and down, and whiles they can hear her sigh and moan so as it's fit for to break yer heart, but she canna cry, they says."

Joan stood by in stony silence; the talk was almost intolerable to her; she felt more and more certain that she had seen Mark, and that he was "after mischief," as she phrased it to herself. She knew from past experience that there was no violence he would stick at to avoid being taken prisoner.

"And that there Mark, as have a been haunting the woods this ever so long!" said Mercy, looking askance at her, "and comin' and goin' to this house as have a done him and his'n good, and ta'en ye a' in i' trouble; and that's how he serves folk in return! It's a sin and a shame, that's what it is! but they a' says Mr. Palmer won't let not a stone unturned, but'll see there's justice done along o' him as he deserves, that's what he will!"

"You've no call to tak' a man's name like that, as ayn't here to speak for hisself, you as knows nowt. He's been loadin' lime, that's what he has," said Joan roused in defence of the absent.

"Knows nowt!" began Mercy, angrily, but she was interrupted by a little messenger who had brought up a peremptory order from Mark to his wife to join him at the barge.

"There! ye see he's just arter his own business!" cried Joan triumphantly, as she began to collect her little packages.

No one spoke in answer.

"Will ye tak' my best frock and gie me what ye will?" said she humbly to her cousin. "Its near new, and I hanna but two or thri coppers left, Mark's took a' I'd a got, and I mun ha' summut to live"—she added half to herself—"who knows where it is he may tak' us to!"

Mrs. Gaunt put some money into her hand—little enough—for she was not insensible to the pleasure of

making a good bargain even at such a moment. Then with a feeling of compunction she said shortly, "Ye may leave Rowan here awhile, I shall maybe want her, there's the funeral to the fore, and washin' for a' them folk as will be comin' and goin', and you not here to help."

It was only by the strongest effort that Joan repressed her sobs as she looked round for the last time on what had been to her a haven of rest. She went up close to old Will, longing for a last word from him at least of compassion and goodwill, but he made no sign of any kind. Was she not the wife of the man who he was convinced had robbed him of his "boy," the joy of his old age?

"Wunna ye wish me God speed, Mustar Ratcliffe?" said poor Joan at last in a despairing tone; but he hardened his heart against a murderer's wife, and turned sternly away. She kissed her children with a stony white face, and left the house in silence.

"What for do mother look like that?" said little Nelly carelessly, as she looked up from her ineffectual attempts to make Douro play with her as usual. The old dog was nearly as depressed as his master, whose grief he shared in that silent sympathy which is often so much better than words. He would not leave Will's side even for a moment, but stood close by his chair wistfully looking into his face, and took not the slightest notice of the child's blandishments.

But Rowan kept all these things in her heart, and did not speak.

Joan made her way across the hill to the limekiln, near the canal, where she found the boat fully laden, and, rather to her surprise, Mark himself ready with the horse.

They started on their slow progress, Mark looking sullen and strange, and scarcely speaking except to swear at her for being late. Presently the boat reached a lonely spot, a quiet curve under the hill, where the tall thick arching woods on both sides almost met over the narrow

canal, while there was nothing to be seen either before or behind them on the towing-path.

Mark jumped on board, and fishing out a bundle from a corner of the dark cabin, almost threw it at his wife—"There, you just wash me that out clean, and you such a fine washywoman!" he muttered, "and mak' haste wi' it too."

Joan opened the clothes with trembling fingers; there were dark stains on the sleeve of the coat and on the torn shirt. "Oh, Mark, what's ever them?" she whispered.

"What's what?" said he furiously, but under his breath. "I axes on ye for to wash me out a bit o' linen as I'm a wanting, and ye mak' a' this riot. I cut mysen, see here!" and he showed her a trifling hurt on his arm. "One 'ud think the sky were coming down! Why dunna ye mak' haste, and do as I bid ye?"

She turned almost sick with dread, but there was indeed no time to be lost. She heated some water as quickly as the square inch of fire in the cabin would allow, and steeped the jacket and the shirt in it, but to little purpose. Mark stood over her suggesting, objecting, scolding, hurrying her on with muttered threats, glancing continually over his shoulder in every direction.

The boat was stationary, he had left the old horse to its own devices, and it was enjoying the unwonted leisure grazing quietly by the side of the towing-path. Everything was utterly still; even the ripples left by the boat in the stagnant water had died away, not a breath was stirring under the thick trees, where the leaves lay rotting in the dull misty autumn day, and everything was steaming wet after the heavy rains of the night before. The great spider's webs in the branches over their heads, threaded with bright little pearls of dew or rain, hung motionless, not a single drop even quivered, not a leaf was shaken down to the ground in the intense quiet; the silence was almost dreadful to him as he listened eagerly, peering uneasily backwards and forwards through the grey haze along the narrow path,

and up and down the woods. But there was nothing to be seen or heard—as yet.

“Rub, rub harder!” he muttered scowling.

But, hard as she rubbed, nothing seemed to get rid of the tell-tale stains—the mud passed away in the soapsuds, the other spots on the clothes disappeared, but the only important ones seemed ingrained in the substance of the stuff.

Joan’s heart seemed to stand still while she fought with the deep brown marks of blood as if they had been living enemies.

“Curse ’em! why dunna ye rub harder, I say!” said Mark in a hoarse whisper. “Gie me the sleeve, I can do better nor that,” and he seized hold of the coat and began to scrub it furiously himself. “There! ye see its a’ gone now,” cried he in a few minutes, as he held up the jacket in triumph.


But when they lifted it out of the water the stain could still be distinctly seen.

“Ye mun cut out the sleeve; no, tear it, ’twill seem best,” said Mark in a voice which she could scarcely hear, “and hide the shirt down below—there! under there!” and he pointed to a dirty hole full of coals and bilge water in the boat.

With the strange want of imagination which seems to characterise men in such circumstances, it never occurred to him, or to her in her flurry, to drown the evidences of guilt. She was paralysed by dread of what might be coming, and had simply strength to do as he ordered her. She had just torn off the coat sleeve and hidden the shirt, while he had resumed his place by the side of the horse, when there was a sound of voices and hurried footsteps.

“Why didna ye bring the childer as I telled ye,” said he in an agony of expectation, “th’ boat would ha’ looked more natural?”

“Ye wouldna ha’ had them in it, Mark,” said she sobbing.



"In what, I'd like to know? they canna ax ye nothink, ye're my wife, and man and wife's one, you just remember that; and I'm about my lawful work, 'twere best this way they'd a' cotch' me anyhow," said he scowling as three men came in sight.

In a few minutes more they were upon him.

"You come along wi' us, there's a warrant out agin ye," said the constables, seizing him roughly." There were several of them, for Mark's strength and determination were only too well known.

"What's this for you're a doin', I'd just like to know," cried he doggedly.

"It's along o' th' young squire's murder, and that you knows right well," answered they.

"You've no right for to touch me," shouted he defiantly. "I were loadin' lime all yesterday, and yer can hear on me at the Spotted Dog, at Cliffe end, till past eight last night, where I were drinkin' wi' Sammy Buxton; ax him. What! it tak's three on ye for to seize a man as hasna so much as a stick i' th' hand! A pretty set yer is for constables, and afeard on me even now, that's what yer is!" he called out with triumphant scorn as they awkwardly put on the handcuffs. His courage had risen when the suspense was over.

The men began to ransack the boat in the aimless, heedless way of old country constables; twice their very hands were on the shifting plank at the bottom on which Joan stood with her heart in her mouth, and twice the dull searcher rose with a grunt. Even Mark's lip had fallen as they felt once more round the cabin, but "there ayn't nowt more here anyways" ended the men in a confident tone, as they came out at last on to the bank.

"There's one on us mun go on wi' you and the barge to th' owners, it canna be left," said the constable to Joan as two of them marched off with their prizes—Mark, the jacket without a sleeve, the muddy trousers, and a number of articles utterly irrelevant and useless—to the nearest magistrate.

"Yon's Mr. Palmer's doing, I'll be bound," said Mark, surlily; but Charles had been summoned away on his father's sudden illness, and had been obliged to leave the getting up of the case to other hands. In spite of the blunders in following up the clues that existed, enough remained for Mark to be committed for trial, and sent off to the jail in the county town.

Poor Joan had pursued her melancholy way along the canal, while the man in charge of the boat from time to time strove to get something out of her. She repeated almost mechanically, however, like a sort of chant, with dogged pertinacity, "I'm his wife, and I dunno know nowt."

Until the prisoner was convicted he was allowed to see his friends, and with the unconscious heroism of which there is so much amongst her class, it never occurred to Joan to cut herself adrift, to make her own way, as she was perfectly able to do, and leave her husband to his well merited fate.

She prepared to keep within reach of the prison, and give the little mite of comfort which he was capable of receiving from her, and found herself a lodging for the night in an obscure public-house.

"D'ye think I can get me work?" said she to the landlady next morning. "I can clear starch, and iron, and get up."

"What, haven't ye no references nor nothin'?" answered the woman suspiciously. "Wherever do ye come from?"

Joan was silent.

"Ye don't suppose as how respectable folk will let ye in wi'out more ado nor a stray cat? Where was ye last?" repeated she.

"I cum frae Scarthing Dale," answered Joan reluctantly.

"What, near where the murder were a Toosday? What did ye hear? Do tell!" cried the landlady eagerly; such news is always welcome at a public-house, and her guest's value rose cent. per cent.

"I heerd nowt," said Joan, writhing under the cross-examination.

"Why the man as done it come from them parts! They says he were the strongest man i'th' country, as could ha' felled an ox, let alone young Squire Heron."

Joan was silent.

"What's yer name, then?" cried the woman impatiently.

"Joan Ogden," she replied, forgetting what the name meant on the spur of the moment.

"Ogdins! Why thattun's the name o' him as has a done for th' young Squire! I'll be swore she's kin to 'im, p'r'aps it's his wife," said a curious bystander.

"What for did ye say as ye knowed nowt?" reproached the woman.

"Because I don't, and I says so now ag'in," answered Joan savagely.

"How short ye do chop one," said the landlady, who had her own reasons for keeping on terms with her. "Ye shall stop and wash here for a fortni't, anyhow," said she, struck by a bright inspiration; and she turned her into an outhouse with a heap of dirty clothes. "'Twill bring drink to the house to have the wife o'th' man as is to be hanged stoppin' here," said she to her husband. "Folks 'ud a'most pay a penny for to look at her through the door, they 'ud!"

The place soon became intolerable to Joan; the questionings and the observations she had to endure only increased day by day with that delight in the details of a murder which never tires; it is, indeed, the form of excitement most enjoyed in the monotony of the life of working men's wives, both in town and country. Her good work, however, enabled her at length to find employment elsewhere, whence at odd times she could make her way to the prison.

Mark was restless and miserable in confinement, and the time of the assizes seemed to him as if it never would arrive—"The days is like weeks, and the weeks is like

years," said he with a sigh, unconsoled even by the congenial company which he found in gaol. "I wish 'twere over, 'tis like as though a man had ye by the throat fast, and then kep' ye waiting ever so long to know an ye'll be throttled or no!"

The courage required to face open danger is of quite another kind from the passive endurance necessary for waiting for a blow about to fall; and the close seclusion of prison was almost intolerable to a man who had spent his days and nights in the open air, with an utter absence of all restraint, moral or physical.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TRIAL.

JANUARY arrived at its usual time, neither delayed nor hurried by the wishes or fears of the community. In those old days the Assize week was the great period of dissipation for the county town and its neighbourhood far and wide, and was longed for in proportion to the quiet of the intervals. The preparation for the balls, the parties, the shows, the gossip, the music, the dinners, for the whole season, were in full swing, a delightful bustle filled the town, the whole place "were just a' in a simmer," as Joan heard repeated joyfully on all sides.

The procession of the sheriff in his grand coach, containing also the two judges, with liveried coachmen, and surrounded by javelin-men, was looked upon with an awe which we can hardly now realise. The sacred number twelve had not long been tampered with; and, treated as representatives of the King wherever they went, to a much greater extent than at present, the majesty of the law in their persons was tremendous. The sheriff, his coach, his

servants, his cattle, and all that was his, were at the beck and call of the bigger magnates as if he had been their servant.

At length the function itself began, the assembling of the performers in court, the two judges in their long red gowns and mighty wigs,—(how can justice possibly be administered in those unhappy countries where there are no wigs?)—the sheriff and the sheriff's wife, and a bevy of ladies, one of them sitting on the bench beside the judge for a few minutes, the barristers taking notes, the attorneys bustling and important, the witnesses looking for the most part puzzled, helpless, and anxious, the crowd of interested spectators, the buzz of cheerful talk going on until even after the proceedings had begun. And in the centre of all, the *raison d'être*, the primal cause of the whole array of law and justice, the anticlimax and dismal point of interest, the degraded, squalid-looking prisoners in the dock, with their succession of vacant, stupid, or sharp and wicked faces.

The court was crowded during Mark's trial, which came on first, for poor Lawrence Heron's death had made a great sensation in the county, and public feeling was much stirred at the ferocious nature of the attack on an unarmed young man—who had so lately returned home that he could have caused no ill-will, of whom no one had anything but good to tell, and the son of a widow.

A buzz of excitement arose when poor Ratcliffe was examined, and his passionate attachment to his young master came out at every word. When the counsel for the prisoner strove to win from him proofs of the oppressiveness of the game regulations, or the "resistless temptation to poaching" offered by the preserving at Roland Hill, he replied—"Why there's scarce been a head o' game on the property not for years and years, and the auld squire as niver had a gun in 's hands sin he were tuk' bad! And my poor boy as have been away in furrin parts this year and more, and we got up as many pheasants as 'ud mak' a wik's good shooting or thereabouts when he come home to his own

and to 's mother, what's waited for him, and yearned after him, and had no other chick nor child—and her a widow too!" cried he angrily.

The mob of roughs hanging round the door was so great that Joan, who had been vainly trying to make her way into a quiet corner of the court, at this moment squeezed forward through the crowd, caught Ratcliffe's reproachful eyes upon her as he stood in the witness-box, and shrunk back as if she had herself been the criminal.

"Mark Ogden was the man as fired at me, he'd a trick wi 's arm as I'd know 'mong a thousand, and the young master were after him like a shot; there were another on 'em I got hold on, and held 'im happen five minutes or so, and that hindered o' me following them. Mark had a bin loiterin' and lingerin' up and down this many weeks arter no good, and I'd a missed one trout arter another, big 'uns too, out o' th' Grey Pool; shot they was, not fished, all on 'em, and I telled 'im as I'd cotch him yet! He's the ronkest 'and as iver I know'd, and a bad limb sin quite he were a boy; a strong 'un iver he were, both wi 's arms and legs."

He was cross-examined as to the amount of light under the trees on such a rainy night, and whether it was possible to recognise a man with a blackened face among a dozen others at eight o'clock in the evening with the moon hidden, but he held to his story.

"Mark had a way o' flingin' his arm over his head as I could swear to anywheres, more by token he'd been up and down this summer to my sister's place at th' Robin Hood, as is washywoman to the Ha', where his wife and two childer's been a lodgin', and I'd come on him amonghand, as 'twere, a many times. I know'd him a deal too well for his good or mine, wi' a bad tongue and a bad heart o' s own! He 's had a hand in every dirty puddle o' mischief as come in 's way wherever he went, this dozen year and more."

The party from the Hall had been too much occupied

with their own share of the pursuit to be able to bear witness to the struggle. The gang of poachers had come clearly from the great black town across the moors, and the man who had escaped out of Ratcliffe's hands disappeared, and could not be heard of, so that the keeper's evidence stood alone and unsupported.

"The whole account rests on the testimony of a man who has evidently long had a violent grudge against the prisoner, and does not disguise his hatred of him," declared Mark's counsel, emphatically.

The innkeeper of the Spotted Dog was the principal witness on Mark's side. Lawrence Heron had been murdered about eight in the evening, and he swore that the prisoner had been drinking in his house until that time. He declared very volubly that he had particularly noticed the hour, because the clock struck as Mark left the house, after saying that he had to get down to the boats to be ready to start early with his load of lime, and that he had to send for his missis.

Sammy Buxton, however, who was summoned to confirm the story, completely broke down under his cross-examination. He would not commit himself as to the hour when he had seen Mark. It might ha' bin six, or maybe it might ha' bin eight, he couldn't swear. He minded hearing the clock strike as Mark left the public, like as Mr. Flintham he 'd said so, but he hadn't tell'd (counted) the time, and he 'd took a good drop afore that, and might be a bit dull. Only to the best o' his judgment Mark stopped till eight, and certain sure he was as he niver could ha' got down to the Ha' by th' time the keeper swore to seein' of him. There was no love lost atwixt they two, everybody know 'd that, and Mr. Ratcliffe he 'd swore he 'd be too many for 'im over and again!

No one had examined Mark at the time to discover traces of the black smutching of the face; his wet trousers were explained by the canal work, and the torn sleeve by an accident in the lime kiln.

Ratcliffe waited in an agony of expectation for the summing up of the Judge. To the surprise of a great part of his audience, he charged in the prisoner's favour. A loud hum of disapproval rose as he finished his address.

"Silence in the court!" cried the hallkeeper sternly, as the old keeper clenched his fist with an inarticulate howl of suppressed rage.

"They says t' Judge ha' sworn niver to convict a poacher!" said a bystander exultingly.

Joan's eyes were fixed on the faces of the Jury as they retired to consider their verdict; her fate now lay in the balance of thought among those untrained, dull, inexpressive faces.

"The foreman looks like a very obstinate man," she heard whispered round her; "just see how tall and narrow his forehead is, and then that heavy jaw! I wonder which side he will take, for he'll stick to it, you may depend upon that, and they won't stir him out of his fancy in a hurry, whichever way it lies."

It soon appeared that there was a great difference of opinion among the Jury, and the foreman returned to say that they could not agree upon their verdict. They were ordered, as usual, to be locked up "without food, fire, or candle," our extremely philosophical method of reducing twelve variously conflicting convictions on such questions as a man's life or death to a proper level of conformity, through the very intelligible and convincing medium of their stomachs.

Joan turned away heartsick as the business of the court went on, and another trial began, while poor Mark, with staring eyes and sunken jaw, was removed to await his sentence in all the misery of deferred hope and fear.

His wife returned home; work will wait for no broken hearts, and must be done whether the workers are sick or well, sad or merry. It is often, however, the greatest help that the wretched can find, to have their thoughts thus forcibly diverted from their sorrows by the necessary

demands of the hour, and this comfort she was not likely to lack.

It was nearly dusk when she slunk along the street once more to the court, and waited outside for a chance of the verdict being soon given. Some snow had fallen, which was trodden into a dirty slushy mass, filthier even than mud itself, when its exquisite crystal surface and pearly whiteness disappear, as is the case with fairer things even than snow. It was cold, and damp, and miserable, and she gradually crept inside the door, and up into the stifling court.

"The Jury's just a comin' out; now for the fun!" cried her neighbours eagerly, as they rushed and struggled to the front.

She could see the jurors as they issued from the room where they had been locked up, the two or three dissentients looking dissatisfied, annoyed, and sulky, the foreman walking in with stolid self-confidence, great in his own conceit at having carried his point.

"Not guilty, my lud," said he aloud with pride. "I'd a sot there till midnight and into the mornin' sooner nor yield!" he added in a low voice, "and I'd had my dinner just afore I went in; so them as had on'y took their breakfastes, when they know'd that, they giv' in!" Presently he went on in a low angry tone, "I'll stick by the Judge, and he's for the acquittal, everybody could see that; and old Squire Heron he stood out agin my wife's mother along o' some fishin' up the Dale, as she allus said were hern, though it wer'n't fully made out. 'Twere a sin and a cryin' shame for him to tak' it, that's what it were, and I know'd he'd come to grief for't."

"But this was the son, not the father," said someone.

"Eh, there's six to one and half-a-dozen to t'other," replied the foreman.

The verdict had been received in dead silence, and then the loud hum of disapproval rose higher than ever in the court, and was again sternly repressed.

Lastly came the Judge's admonitory warnings, and his recommendation to the prisoner to give up his evil ways and lead a better life than that which had been proved against him.

" 'Tis like the fine words at the end o' a letter, th' Judge dunno know nowt about the matter nor the man, nayther for the past nor the future!" said old Ratcliffe furiously, shouldering his way by main force into the street.

Joan's mental comment was much the same, as she pressed up to her husband's side and prepared to steal away with him in silence. But this was by no means the pleasure of the roughs of the town, who considered his acquittal as a victory scored on their side. He was laid hold of boisterously before they had gone many steps and carried off to a public house in triumph, in spite of his wife's entreaties, and she saw no more of him that night.

It was not till late the next day that he turned up, when he slouched into her lodging crestfallen and sober. "Well, ye see, I've got off this turn, anyhow," said he, with a dogged laugh.

"I'm glad on it," said Joan with a sigh. It was at least some comfort to feel that her little ones would not be branded as the children of a murderer.

"I've a been to them owners," went on Mark sullenly, "and axed for the boat again. They wunna let me ha' it, curse 'em. But as I were comin' away, one o' them whipper-snapper masters cried arter me as there were the 'Crazy Jane' (that's the barge as has never yet been in dock) as were to go her last voyage, and I might tak' her and be hanged."

Joan was silent.

"What time shall ye be ready to start?" he said surlily.

"I'd thowt for to have the childer here, and Rowan and me to mak' our bread by washin' and kip the little un. We canna leave 'em upo' Mercy and Mrs. Heron no longer" (he winced a little). "You wouldna think o' that yer own sen, Mark," said she dismally, and her tears rained down

among the soapsuds as she thought of what seemed to her now a lost Paradise.

"Ye might come wi' me this once, lass. I canna bide them long nights i' th' boat by mysen," answered he, and there was a desolate inflexion in his voice which touched her. "It ayn't not for any long while this turn, anyhow, and then we'd see what'll turn up. Wunna ye stand by me this once, Joan?"


Her heart sank within her; it was horrible to her to begin upon the old life once more, but the instinct of help to those in trouble, which it takes years of ill usage to wear out of a woman's heart, prevailed. She could not speak, but she nodded her assent, and, with a self-sacrifice which there was none to honour, she once more gave up the opening to respectability and comfort which her hard work had won for her for the husband who only sought her help when there was none else to be had.

Mark left the room with a grunt, which was his only form of acknowledgment, and she sank down in the nearest chair and covered her face with her hands.

CHAPTER X.

THE LAST NIGHT'S WORK.

So the old weary round began again, the long empty days of hardship, varied by outbreaks of violence from Mark. It was like the penance inflicted by some ingenious Russian despot on a prisoner condemned to Siberia. The wretched man journeyed on and on all day and every day to his destination as he believed for weeks in a closed prison; but found at last that he had only been carried in a circle, for ever moving, but never getting on, a sort of mental and moral treadwheel. There seemed to be no end to the



reiteration of these monotonous days of blank misery to Joan, and no change; her husband was cowed and sulky, silent and preoccupied; his temper was more fitful than ever, and he talked in his sleep sometimes in a way which made her blood run cold, but he was not unkind, and she felt as if he clung to her. If she could but keep him from the drink there might yet be hope for them in the future.

"What's them barrels for?" she enquired one day when some fresh cargo was put on board half way on their route, and hidden under the rest without any apparent reason.

"Never you mind; what business is it o' yourn?" cried he angrily.

He had till now had no money, and the habit of abstaining during his three months of prison had helped his sobriety; now, however, he had just received a fortnight's pay. That night the boat was moored near a small bridge, where a road crossed the canal. Joan was sitting as usual waiting. Mark had gone out in search, as she felt sure, of spirits of some sort; she knew by sad experience the exact position of every public-house on the way. In the silence of the little black cabin the hunger of her heart after her children became almost intolerable, and she was rocking herself backwards and forwards, and sobbing aloud, when she saw Mark come in; he looked moody, but not savage.

"What's up now?" said he, seeing his wife's tears.

"Oh, Mark, I canna stop away from them childer no more! I mun see the little 'un, and I want Rowan. Mercy 'll maybe turn on 'em, and she's such a little 'un is Nelly!"

"Have them here if you're wantin' them so sore, I tell'd ye so before," said Mark.

"Nay, 'twould be ruination to 'em wi' the swearin' and the drink, &c.; let me goo lad, let me goo, and see what we can do to make us a home where we can bide. Its a bad life, Mark. Satan will ha' ye yet, I'm afeard. You've got off once, but 'twill hardly be again. Wunna ye think well on it to change the life afore it's too late."

"I'll daff him yet, that Satan," answered he, half

laughing, "thou'lt see!" Then, after a moody pause, he went on, "It is a beast o' a life, and there's no mistake on it. I dunno mind if I change to summat else soon. We'll go to them Pottery places, there's work there for a man to do. And you can fetch the childer; I'd like to see the little 'un mysen, and maybe I might na drink so mich an we were more settled like. When this one voyage is done we'll set to, you and me."

"Wunno ye bide quiet to-night?" said Joan anxiously, seeing that he was preparing to leave the cabin again; "it's getting quite late."

"I be waitin' for Tommy Goodall, as wanted to speak about some coal," said he over his shoulder, as he went away.

She lay down a little cheered—she was not very hopeful, but he seemed in earnest, and even a small ray of light is valuable in a dark place. She waited and waited long for him to return, but it was nearly midnight before he came back—furiously drunk. He was so violent that in her terror she jumped off the boat on to the towing-path to get out of his way in fear of her life.

"Ye shanna come back agin, now ye're gone, I can tell ye!" shouted he, pushing the barge away from the bank. In spite of her entreaties he refused to let her return to shelter. "Ye may just stop where ye be! As ye mak' yer bed ye mun sleep i' yer bed!"

He was too far gone to reason with, and she turned away to seek some other cover for the rest of the night. There was a cottage not far off, but the inmates were too sleepy or too indifferent to hear her requests to be let in, "only to be let to sit by the fire." She knocked at a farmhouse below the bridge, but it looked even more dead, and there was a barking dog in the yard which terrified her.

At length she turned in among the haystacks in a field further on, and determined to wait with what patience she could till morning.

It was very cold, and she was only half clad. For some

time her indignation kept her warm. "That I should ha' believed him agin, arter so many years!" she repeated, angry with herself, as she walked up and down to keep life stirring in her. It was a beautiful starlit night, clear and bright. A planet, like a little moon, was shining in the wintry sky. "And there's them stars goes tramping overhead, up there, and never heeds! And He's just as deaf that made 'em. Why be I left to starve and clem while others is in their warm beds to-night," thought she, "and wi' good husbands for to cherish and work for 'em! It's very hard. 'Hard usage mak's hard hearts,' and them's true words, they is—mine is hard!"

And then the remembrance of her far off children came over her, and she cried more gently, "I'll go, I'll go, and little Nelly 'll lay her head upo' my breast and comfort me, she will. I will na stop no more wi' Mark as have cast me off like this."

A distant church clock struck the hour, and the sweet chime in the quiet night sounded like a companion, and soothed and quieted her. She lay down in a dry place under the haystack and was sinking off into sleep, when she was roused by a tremendous explosion; the ground shook, the houses within reach were rent as by an earthquake. Again and again came the startling noise and light; the dark night was lit up with an ascending sheaf of sparks and flame, the glare of the red fire shone on the dim trees, the hedgerows, the buildings, and lighted up the whole sky with its lurid blaze and fierce glow. Then all was still, and she hurried up to the spot. The morning was beginning to break, and she could just see the blackened ends of beams and planks, splintered and torn, hurled in every possible direction; some were sticking in the trees, some had been driven wildly into the fields. The bridge was destroyed, the two houses before which she had stood were torn open, and the inmates were screaming and rushing wildly out on the road from their beds in every variety of undress and stage of terror.

"What is it, what have a happened?" cried they as they saw the solitary wayfarer standing, looking awestruck about her.

"Tis the barge mun ha' been loaded wi' gunpowder, 'tis my belief, and has blowed hisself up," gasped Joan. "Mark will ha' been smokin', I tak' it."

"Eh, 'tis Joan, the bargeman's wife!" cried a man who had often seen her on board. "And how cam' ye ashore all alone? Canna ye tell how it a' happened, woman?"

"I know'd there were summat strange aboard, he'd niver let me wi' a candle nigh that end o' th' boat, but he would na tell me what 'twere. He would na smoke as commonly, for fear o' sparks, he said one day, but he were just mad drunk last night and off o' his head like. He turned me right away. I reckon he scarce knew what he did," muttered the poor woman, as they began to look into the damage done.

Fortunately there was no one missing but Mark, though the two houses were a complete wreck; and far away in the fields, here and there, the mutilated remains of what was once her husband were at length collected with difficulty and brought up for examination.

The gunpowder had given its own evidence with frightful clearness, and though Joan was taken before a magistrate to be questioned, but little explanation was necessary in the case; it was proved that she had left the boat some hours before the explosion took place, and there was little to be added. It seemed to her, however, longing to be gone, as if the incomprehensible forms and ceremonies to be gone through would never be ended; they consumed the rest of the short winter's day.

"And now I may just go back to my childer?" she enquired eagerly when all was over at last.

"Where are they?" enquired the authorities compassionately.

"Down in the Dales along wi' Mrs. Heron's washy-woman," she explained not very lucidly.

"And how do you intend to get there, then?" asked the oldest magistrate kindly.

"Just tramp along the road," she answered, with a sigh.

A few shillings were given her to pay the fare of a coach, and she started northward as soon as she could.

"Eh, to see the things run by this fashion, and to mind the days and days we've been coming along the watter the same road!" thought she from her dizzy, cold elevation, as she was being whirled along in the night towards the old hill country.

She reached the nearest point to the Robin Hood early in the morning, and worn out with misery of body and mind together, cold, wretched, weary, and heartbroken, she crawled slowly up to the house on the hill.

"Eh, Joan, is that you?" said Mercy, sternly from over her wash tubs, "you warn't thinkin' o' comin' here for to stop? 'Twouldn't be seemly that. Old Madam have scarcely a spoke not to no one a' this while, but she've a bin as kind as kind, and gone on paying for little Nelly, and sent me money for to put the two on 'em in black, and it's they as ought for to be in mournin' by rights for what's happened, if ony body should mourn, there's no doubt o' thattens, nobody can't deny. But 'tis somewhere else than Scarthing Dale as ye mun get yer livin'!"

Joan, however, scarcely heard, and made no answer; she was hugging little Nelly in her arms and straining her passionately to her heart. The child was puzzled and cross, received the caresses but coldly, and escaped as quickly as she could from her mother's grasp.

"Ye hurts me, pinchin' me so hard," said she peevishly.

"Eh, if it isn't mother come home again!" cried Rowan much more joyfully, as poor Joan turned even to her in her unsatisfied longing after love.

"Mark's dead," said she laconically, when Nelly had gone off to school and Rowan to work, and she was left alone with Nat and his wife.

"And that's the best thing for you, and them, and

us all. But ye canna stop here, that 'ud niver do wi' what's past and gone," said Mercy, anxious for the good reputation of her house, and to harbour no suspicious characters. "Where will ye go to?"

"I dunno know," answered Joan hopelessly. She looked ten years older, and all initiative seemed starved out of her.

Old Nat was kinder than his wife. "There's a cousin o' mine lives at Blashfield, I've been thinkin', might help to get you work. Ye'd find washing enow to do there; 'tis the blackest place a' round. I'll borry a cart, and auld Sammy's tit, and drive ye a' three over mysen; 'taint above nineteen mile. Ye can stop here along wi' us whiles, surely, till we has time for to settle things a bit. Madam wunna tak' it ill, I'll warrant, not for a matter o' three or fower days."

"I mun get ye a black frock, then, for to show a' the folk as ye're a widow, and that that there Mark's dead. Acquitted him, indeed!—a pack of fools!—when a' the world knows as he done it, and 'twould on'y ha' served him right for to swing for 't! It's little as you've lost, Joan Ogden, that's what I say."

"And how about poor Madam?" enquired Joan sadly.

"She's just a goin' to stop on at the Ha', quiet. The nevvie as the property comes to bides at his own home, and will na meddle nor make. She wunna overget the blow in a hurry, but there she'll just live on, wi' all the heart ta'en out on her, they says. There's my brother have a tuk it to heart a'most as much as Madam; he's niver seemed his own man sin' that night and that bad mornin' when the body were found down i' th' Grey Pool. 'Twere a bad tale, Joan, and I'll tellee what, 'twould be far better as ye should leave yer name behind ye; 'twill on'y be a hamper and a hobble wherever ye goes, and everyone axin' why, an' how, an' where, an' a'!"

"I could ca' mysen Allen, like my mother," answered the poor woman sorrowfully. "Th' tale might, maybe, be a hurt to th' childer."

The vicarious suffering, the punishment due to the guilty, so often borne by the innocent, had fallen heavily upon her.

Before the end of the week, Nat drove the forlorn little family over to the great black town where they were to be absorbed as a drop in the ocean of life, seething under its clouds of smoke.

"What a dirty place!" said little Nelly, pouting, "and so big and smelly!"

At length they reached a small black house on the outskirts. The road was black; the bits of stunted trees were black; the walls were made of black clinkers from some foundry; the rain was black, even before it reached the black earth.

It is difficult to believe that our so-called civilisation is an advance, at the sight of such unclean hives of men as are growing up in the "black North," eating into the beautiful land, as made by nature, like a canker into a rose. Neither mentally, morally, nor materially can they be considered as an improvement on the old life as yet—the "barbarisms of civilisation" are all at present that they have attained to, whatever the future may bring. But Nat's country cousin was a comfortable, easy body like himself, and her face was bright, if her cap was dingy.

"Why, Nat! why 'tis a matter o' twenty year sin' I've a seed ye! Ye're as welcome as sun at harvest time! I'll do my best for thi wife's cousins; bloods thicker nor water; sit ye down and tak' summat. I'm a poor widder, but 'tis the widders is allus most ready wi' their mite, Scripture says! I've a got 'em a lodgin' as ye said ye'd pay a fortnit's rent, and I've a spoke to th' doctor, what lives inside them garden rails, and there's a bit o' work coming I'm thinkin' if she's fit for to do it."

"I'll tell 'e what, Joan," said old Nat at parting, as he put a little money into her hands, no longer checked by his wife's chilling influence, "there's more where this come from, the childer as has been like my own a' these months

shanna clem, an ye wants help ye mun write, and God bless ye and keep a good heart in ye, poor woman."

Joan's heart was too full for speech, as she gripped one of the old man's hands, while Rowan held fast to the other. Even little Nelly was moved to sorrow at parting. "I'll come back and see ye, Nat," said she comfortingly, "dunna ye cry!"

CHAPTER XI.

NELLY'S RULE.

THINGS prospered with poor Joan as the years went on. "She's a very strivin' 'ooman, that's what she is," was Widow Buxton's approving verdict. "She'll do. I've scratted and she mun scrat, but I dunno see no sense in pamperin' and spoilin that little wench o' hern. Nowt's too good for her; the frocks she has, and the hats, and the schoolin' and the care, as is enow for a crowned queen, it is! And how's it a' to end, that's what I passes the remark!"

But no sensible remarks had any effect on Joan, whose whole soul was wrapped up in Nelly.

"She's pretty enow and to spare," said the shrewd old woman, "and wi' as mony fancies, and whimsies, and ways as if she'd five and twenty pound to her fortune, and what'll ever she do for a poor man's wife I'd like to know! Goin' to be apprenticed to a milliner is she? If she'd larn to put more inside of her head and less on it out, 'twould be no worse for them as belongs to her, that's my way o' thinkin'!"

Nelly was growing up fast, and the "something genteel" in life, which was the prime object of her ambition, varied with inconvenient facility. At last, one morning, she came out with a fresh scheme.

"Amy Rawson 's going to the Pelham Boarding School, mother, and she says why wont you give me a year or two there, because she's so fond of me, and don't like to part with me? She's spoken to the lady, and there's room. She says it would be a great advantage to me, and so it would."

"I canna afford it, my darling," answered her mother, stroking her little tyrant's smooth cheek.

"Oh, yes, you can, mother, it won't cost so very much, and it will be so good for me. You always do what's good for me, you know," said she, putting her arms round her mother's neck.

It was an argument whose excellence Joan never could resist.

"I'll think about it, dear heart," said she.

"But you'll do it, mother," persisted Nelly, "because I want it so."

"If we tuk the money out o' th' Savings Bank we might manage," said Joan to her prime minister, Rowan, in the shelter of the wash tubs, "and we've got so much work now as we might have another 'ooman in regular for to help—'twould pay, and more too."

"I wish old Widder Buxton were alive, she'd ha' spoke out, that she would," thought Rowan to herself; then aloud, she went on—"Why should ye work so hard for Nelly, mother, and hamper yersen, and spend the brass you've earned so sore, and as you'll want when ye grows old? And 'twill na mak' Nelly no happier nor she is now, as far as I can see."

They were both looking into the parlour which was considered sacred to Nelly, and could see the slender girlish figure sitting in the window, working diligently at some dainty little adornment for herself. The delicately pencilled line of her eyebrows, and the long dark lashes curved at the ends, the smooth oval of the face hanging over her work, made a very pretty picture for a stranger to look at; but beside her lay the basket of her undarned stockings, which

she was leaving for Rowan to mend, while even the cap which she had undertaken to make up for her mother had been left half finished while she arranged a little net "fichu" for her own fair shoulders, so that the moral side of the composition was not quite so enchanting as the material.

Her mother, however, looked on tenderly, without seeing, as was her wont.

"She's put out now wi' our ways, as is not smart enow for her. What will it be, out o' a boarding school?" added Rowan gently.

"I wunna ha' ye jalousin' o' your sister, Rowan. She's as sweet as May flowers, and why shouldn't she ha' the best o' all things? She's fit for 'em, that's what she is," said Joan, annoyed.

The girl was silent; she did not choose to be reproached again for envy, and Nelly had, as usual, her own way.

The boarding school required every penny they could scrape together, even with the extra washing they now took in. Rowan, a girl still, in years, but old before her time, plain, patient, depressed, self-sacrificing, laboured on harder than ever, with small thanks for her pains, scarcely even any notice of them. But the family managed thus to make both ends meet.

Every time Nelly returned from her school she was less and less pleased with the homely talk and ways of her mother and sister.

"Thou'st lookin' gradely to-day, my wench—a fair sight for sair e'en," said Joan fondly, as her daughter came home one day.

"You shouldn't say 'gradely,' mother! I wish you'd try and speak good English, as they do at Pelham Seminary."

"Eh, child, I canna clip my words as thou dost! Thou mun e'en tak' me as I be. I'm too old to change," laughed Joan a little sadly.

"But it's not nice, when the girls come, to hear you talk just like the common people," said Nelly, pouting, as she

raised her graceful head with a slight expression of disgust.

"But ayn't we just common people!" observed Rowan, "and why should us seem other nor we be?"

"You don't know anything about these things," replied her sister, gently but decidedly. "I always tell the girls it's a laundry, but quite in a large way!"

Quite unconscious how far the grand lines of her mother's fine face, which reminded one of the reading Sybil in the Sistine ceiling, were superior to her own pink and white expressionless beauty, Nelly was vexed at the ordinary looks (as she thought them) of her mother and sister. *Her* relations, she thought, ought to be better clad, and make more of themselves.

"I can't bear to see you making such guys of yourselves, mother! I wish you wouldn't wear that ugly brown stuff, nor Rowan either. Pretty things don't cost a bit more than ugly ones, everybody says so!"

"Does they, dearie?—then 'everybody' hanna got to buy many things out o' little gits," said her mother, laughing, "and we canna affourd no better while thou'st at the boordin' school." Then, fearing the implied reproach might gall her child, she made haste to add, "They're quite good enow for the like o' we, when hard work mun be done."

She might have saved her pains; Nelly was perfectly unconscious that anything could be thought a sacrifice when her good was concerned, or that any gratitude for it was called for on her part. She persisted in her plans for the improvement of her family, entirely, as she considered, for their own sakes.

"Let me get you and her a pretty gown, as my present, mother. I'll choose them at Blake's, where Amy Rawson gets hers. This one of mine comes from there, and I saw a genteel little stripe that would do quite nicely."

"And who's to pay for 'em, I wonder? Hast thou got a gold mine i' thy box?" answered her mother lovingly,

smiling delightedly at this fresh evidence of her child's good heart.

It was not the first time that Nelly had made presents at other people's cost, and taken credit to herself for other people's sacrifices; but then her eyes were so beautiful and said such tender things for her; while it seemed as if all that fell from such lovely lips must be charming like themselves. The traditional pearls and diamonds have by no means ceased to fall from beautiful mouths, and their glamour is still as powerful as in any old fairy tale. There was a certain native grace in her which made whatever she did or left undone seem always exactly right. She had all sorts of pretty attentions for others—unfortunately, however, they were quite irrespective of their real wants and wishes, and were done because they were required by her ideal of what was becoming to herself. She was unconsciously always acting up to a part, the sweet pretty line of business, which demands an appreciative audience to be developed to its full. So that like Punch *en retraite*, she was not quite so delightful in private as in public.

She was not exactly selfish, but her life had developed her sense of her own personality to such a degree, it was so interesting to herself and apparently to others, that it covered the whole field of her vision, and nothing beyond could be even seen, except as connected with that central personage.

Year after year she contrived to delay her return from school where she was the model pupil, the prettiest, cleverest, best mannered, the pride of her mistress's heart, who was unwilling to part with her. But she was now seventeen, and even Joan began to be puzzled as to what was to become of her fine lady daughter in the very uncongenial sphere of the laundry.

For the moment, however, the evil day was staved off by a number of visits which Nelly paid to her school-fellows, whence she brought back rapturous accounts of delights unimagined by drudging souls at home. These

cost Joan a good deal of money, for the standard of what "other girls had" was used as a battering-ram to obtain whatever Nelly thought pleasant, which she generally succeeded in getting.

At length the dreaded time arrived, and she returned home, much to her own distress and, indeed, surprise, for the programme of life at the Academy and the visions of her schoolfellows, always included a "good match," as a matter of course, at the end of their time. The verb "to marry" scarcely required an accusative case in their minds, but was an impersonal intransitive action. She was astonished and displeased when as yet no such natural and ever necessary result to the piano strumming, and the antimacassar making, the use of the globes, and the bead work, had been obtained in life.

The budget of resources furnished by the "Establishment" did not include anything so low as preparation for the probable duties of any station to which she might be called, and she was by no means in a charming mood. She found fault with everything, was a little sad and not a little cross; all her mother's plans for pleasing her met with no response; she persisted in shewing how hard she felt the fate of which she was the innocent victim.

"Was you expecting onybody to-day," said Rowan one morning, unsuspectingly. She had found her beautiful sister as usual, in her prettiest array, drawing aside the muslin blind in the parlour, and looking moodily out into the very uninteresting road, with a "he cometh not, he cometh not" look on her face.

"Surely it's hard if one mayn't so much as look out of the window in this dull place without your fancying that I'm trying to——" began Nelly, a little sharply.

"What ever shall we do if she's to go on like this here, carin' for nothin', doin' o' nothin', just cravin' for what we hanna got to gie," thought Rowan, despairingly. "You couldna do a bit o' that fine frillin', dearie, couldst thou?"

"I've got the headache," said Nelly, shortly.

At that moment a gig drove rapidly up and stopped at the door. Nelly drew back hurriedly, with a smile on her face, as a young man came into the room with a half shy, half defiant, manner.

"It's Mr. Robinson, mother, nephew to Miss Rawson's aunt, where I was stopping, you know," said she.

Mr. Robinson's condition was very evident; his light hair was oiled and brushed, his brilliant waistcoat (it was the day of gorgeous waistcoats), and bright red necktie, proclaimed his state of mind to all beholders. Mr. Wallace has shown how during the time of courtship the cock birds develop all sorts of crests and wattles, and fine head and tail feathers; but Mr. Robinson was short and thick, and his ornamental plumage could hardly be said to add to his attractions.

In vain did Nelly make conversation in the very highest style of the Pelham seminary; nothing could put him at his ease.

"Won't you come out and take a walk, Miss Nelly, the day being fine for exercise," said he at last, quite at the end of his resources.

"I wonder what the young man's come about?" said Joan suspiciously. "I dunno think there's much sense in that noddle o' his."

Rowan was silent, she knew that her opinion was not wanted.

Presently the pair returned, Nelly all blushing and dimpling, as she came up and kissed her mother with great fervour.

"I'm come to say, Mrs. Allen," began the suitor importantly,—“in short, Mrs. Allen, you will perceive that I am wishful to make your daughter my wife, and I don't participate any objections on your part! I'm in a nice way of business in the grocery line,” he said with considerable pride, “and though my mother's alive, she shall be no impediment.”

Joan was taken aback; in spite of Nelly's evident unfit-

ness for home, her mother could not bear to lose her so soon, and she began to hate the smug little grocer with a most unreasonable dislike.

"She's full young, Mr. Robinson," she said stiffly.

"The more time for us to be happy, Mrs. Allen; in short, Mrs. Allen—the happy day, Mrs. Allen, let it be as soon, I say, as can be, Miss Nelly having given consent," replied he.

"Mr. Robinson," Joan blurted out, "I've heerd say a marriage ayn't a marriage except by the true name; oun ayn't Allen, but Ogden."

She had a morbid fancy that this would tell her story.

"And what for did you change it?" said the intending bridegroom, growing very red in the face.

"There was trouble when young Mr. Heron died. You'll ha' heerd o' Mr. Heron's death—but Mark were acquitted, he were," said Joan, with an indescribable mixture of emotions in her tone—"and then he (that's Mark) were blowed up in an explosion on board o' th' barge, and my cousin thowt as we'd best begin afresh, and not drag the name arter us," she said with a sigh.

"What, what? I can't understand a bit," said Robinson, beginning painfully to unravel the sad story from unwilling lips. "Why did ye never tell me all this before? it worn't fair, and me so kind and a', and never to hear nothink?" and he turned almost piteously to his lady for light out of the involved and dismal perspectives of sorrows and crimes which were opening upon his unwilling eyes.

"I knew nothing about it, I didn't indeed," cried Nelly, in a flood of tears. "I was so small, and nobody ever so much as mentioned it; I remembered there was some dark tale, but I knew no more than you do what it was all about, nor that it was so near to me till now—I'm telling you the truth."

It was so nearly true that she might be excused for saying so. The recollections of a child of six years old are so evanescent that, if never revived, the past may become

almost as if it never had been, particularly with Nelly's habit of persistently ignoring any unpleasant facts and associations.

"I must just go home and think all this matter over, Mrs. Allen—Ogden, I mean," said Robinson in his most important tone. "I'm an independent man, my father's dead and left the business (what's quite in a genteel way) to me; and my mother, she were of opinion already as I wasn't doin' justice to myself, but we never, neither on us, looked for anything like this!" He felt rather as if he had been cheated.

Nelly looked a whole volume of despairing reproaches at her mother.

"If she were to marry you, it would'nt signify what's her name, whether 'twere Allen or Ogden," said Joan abruptly, in unwilling answer to her child's look. "We'll promise not to trouble 'you nor her wi' comin', so as you might be a' to yourselves, if that's any good, and if she wished it," she ended, looking wistfully at Nelly, but there was no reply in her face.

Robinson made no answer, got solemnly into his gig, and drove away in funereal silence; while his Ariadne, in lovely despair, stood with her hands clasped before her until he was out of sight.

"How could ye, mother! spoiling it all when we were both so happy. Why couldn't you hold your tongue!" she cried passionately.

"I mun speak the truth, child, come what may. And thou'd ha' been a pretty coil an he'd fund out i' th' church as he didna know thy right name! If he dunna come back, he's worth no salt tears from thee, my darlin'!" But the girl turned away in wrath, without any answer.

Miss Nelly's friends had a good deal to bear from her the next few days, during which she heard nothing from her swain. He went on brooding over his wrongs, as he persisted in considering them, and in punishing the authors of his woes by at least a period of silence. But

with a sort of dogged determination to have his own choice of action free, he discreetly kept his perplexities from his mother, a large slow woman always used to her own way, and to be greatly considered for her somewhat aggressive virtues.

On the third day after the scene at the laundry, the mother and son had a smart passage at arms—between what she considered his presumptuous ignorance, and he thought her unwarrantable interference—it was not by any means for the first time since he had come to the grocer's throne. He found Mrs. Robinson peering into a hogshead in the back shed.

"I'm sure yer father would no more ha' let such stuff as that there sugar into the shop nor nothing, Johnny!" said she, sniffing it with withering scorn, "and wi'out consulting me too! Him that never did nothing but what he'd ax my advice first, poor man, ever sin' the very beginning we married. And that last cheese as ye bought, what's just like soap, and bad soap too!" cried she in a tone of loud disgust. There were no purchasers within hearing, or her frankness might not have been quite so outspoken.

Johnny was exceedingly angry, the more so that he himself had some doubts as to the wisdom of his own purchases. "I'd have ye leave me alone, mother. I ayn't a child as cannot run alone. I know what's what as well as any man; the cheese is well enough, and so's the sugar!"

And then unwise Mrs. Robinson, feeling, probably not without good reason, that her opinion in wives, as well as in cheeses, was considerably more discriminating than that of her son, pursued her improving remarks as she stood square and solemn before him, her mouth pursed up between her fat cheeks, and her eyes rounded with consciousness of the importance of her position and of the dignity with which she filled it.

"And you've a been after that girl again I hear, Johnny! I'm surprised at yo', you that might marry anybody, scarce, and a nice bit o' money, too, into the bargain,

to go and throw yourself away this fashion without sufficient cause, and on'y a laundress's daughter as I hear tell! Just you listen to me, and when you've a cut your wisdom teeth you'll be thankful enow to me for saving of you from such a young hussy as that, wi' nothing but her face to her fortune. 'Handsome is that handsome does!'" ended Mrs. Robinson, drawing herself up. Nobody could ever have accused her of being handsome, but on the other hand she had done her duty and brought "the first lot o' money" into the concern.

"You just hold your tongue, mother," cried Johnny indignantly, "I'll choose my own wife, and I'll choose my own cheese, and have my own way in my own house and over my own counter, so now you have my mind of it!" And he flung out of the door. "I'll show her as I'm not to be put upon like this," muttered he to himself majestically, as he strode down the street and hired the gig to drive out to the laundry.

"I'm come back, you see, Miss Nelly," said he consequentially as he entered. "I mean to do as I please in this and other matters, and as there seems to be — objections," (he put it euphemistically to himself) "and I'm quite independent, and the shop's mine, I've been thinking that if we went away and was married at Scarborough or somewhere, nobody 'd ever be the wiser as to Nelly's name, and we should come back and start square and even 'after the jaunt.'"

"Scarborough!" cried Joan in dismay.

"Yes, mother," put in Nelly eagerly, me and you can take a lodging. and Mr. Robinson be backwards and forwards, and Rowan take care of the laundry. I'm sure it's an excellent plan!" ("I didn't think he'd so much gumption," she added to herself.)

There was no time lost in making their expedition, from which, however, Joan returned sadly and even sternly silent; Rowan could hardly win a word from her about the marriage or the doings of the wedding party.

"Eh, if it werna the longest day's and the hardest work as ever I've a gone through I dunno when!" said she, as she sat down in her own chair, and flung away vigorously the bonnet and cloak with which Nelly had carefully equipped her up to the level of her position as mother of the bride. "Wi' nowt to do but a strollin' and starin' up and down at folk what were doin' nothink nayther but to stare and stroll too, 'twere enow to break one's heart. And that's most as I ha' to tell thee! If it hadna been for sewin' for Nelly I should ha' gone crazy, I do believe!"

She could not say how she had missed unconsciously the comfort of Rowan's presence to talk over the conflicting emotions within her. She had never before been thrown on Nelly alone, and had dimly perceived that the soil of her child's nature was too shallow for any discussion either of the past or the future. Even the absorbing question of the bows on the bride's bonnet, which was filling Nelly's soul, hardly sufficed for her mother's whole day. She answered meekly when such questions as—"Do you think that satin or sarcenet will look best on the white chip, mother?" had been propounded in many shapes and many times over, and when the position of the orange flowers inside had been settled by often-repeated and crucial experiments; but when, on the day before the wedding, there still seemed to be no room in her child's mind except for clothes, Joan once broke out—

"Clothes is a poor reed to lean on, and wunna help thee much, Nelly, when thoust heart sick and body sore; and them times comes i' th' smoothest life, I'm afeard thou'lt find."

Nelly positively stared. "Heartsick!" she cried, "why one would think I was marrying the sweep, mother, instead of Mr. Robinson, that owns his own shop!" and she drew back with some dignity.

Joan held her peace thenceforth and for ever.

There was, however, one scene to be undergone when the wedded pair returned from their jaunt to the little red

grocer's shop in the Blashfield black street, towards which even Nelly looked forward with some misgiving. Johnny had only written to tell his tale to his mother on the day but one before, and they were still uncertain how the news had been received.

"Married!" screamed Mrs. Robinson senior, when they appeared at the private door of the shop, backing down the narrow passage into the parlour of her own parlour as Nelly advanced, "married!" she repeated, "and me to know nothing of it, and Johnny my only son! And may I make so bold as to ask, ma'am, what you was both thinkin' of doin' wi' regard to the shop and me, what has rights and claims on it wi' all the money as I've sunk there, and shan't stir out o' this till all's settled, and the furniture, too, what's mostly mine!"

Johnny had slunk away, leaving the rival queens of Brentford to have the battle for supremacy out before he made his appearance. But Nelly was quite equal to the occasion. Feeling is inconvenient on such occasions, and prevents the acting of a part being perfect, as seen from without, while the sweet serenity of indifference gives great power in dealing with an angry woman.

"I am sure that Mr. Robinson will see that his mother's claims are properly settled, and that he will do all that is right about it. And now I know you will kindly let us have some tea, we've come a long way, and I'm very tired with my journey. We could hardly discuss business so late at night, could we?" said she with a sweet smile, and beginning to take off her bonnet—a fresh aggravation in Mrs. Robinson's eyes.

"How comfortable this parlour looks after the cold drive!" added the fair bride.

"I should think it did!" cried its scandalised mistress.

A grinning maid stood by prepared to witness Nelly's discomfiture, to whom she next turned somewhat sternly—

"There's a box and bag for you to bring out of the gig, and pray take care how you carry them upstairs."

"There's no place ready 'upstairs,' I can tell you," said Mrs. Robinson, sneeringly, as Nelly prepared to go. "What! you on'y wrote yesterday, and thinks I'm to be at your beck and calls! and get things, and beds, and a'! This ayn't a lodging house, I'd ha' ye to know!"

"It was a pity, and very trying, no doubt. Mr. Robinson was very sorry, I heard him say so, but he thought he couldn't do otherwise, as he feared you were not quite agreeable to our marriage," said Nelly gently, but still going on with her tour of inspection of the upper regions.

There was indeed nothing ready for them. Mrs. Robinson inhabited the front room, "Johnny's light closet" was just as he had left it, but there still remained the guest chamber, the state room, "with tape-tied curtains never meant to draw," and all the useless ornaments usual in such dismal apartments.

"This will do very well for us; I dare say you thought so," said Nelly, looking in, unmoved by the watch pockets, the veil of coarse crochet over the looking-glass, all the glories of the sacred precincts, which were considered by their mistress as almost too fine to be ever used at all.

"Do very well! I should think so! The most bestest room i' Blashfield! And as to where you should go, I niver giv the matter so much as a thought!" protested Mrs. Robinson fiercely.

"There need be no trouble, the girl and I will make the bed, if you will be so good as to give us the sheets," observed Nelly with perfect decorum, turning to the blowsy maid, who was beginning to go over to the enemy, as decidedly she felt likely to carry the day in the house.

Mrs. Robinson, senior, felt the defection keenly, and muttering "Ye may git yer sheets where ye can," majestically retired downstairs to try her hand upon her son.

When Johnny slunk in from the shop a few minutes after, he found the discomfited foe standing gloomily buttering muffins by the parlour fire.

"And a pretty trick you've served me, Johnny Robin-

son, marryin' without a word this fashion!" cried his mother, bursting into tears as he came in. "And a pretty wife as you've a brought home wi' ye, taking possession of the house, and ordering a' things as if they were hern, managing the nose off o' one's face, as one may say, and as cool as a cucumber a' the while! You'll ha' yer own handful o' her, that's my opinion, and that I do believe," she added triumphantly, as she saw her son's face change.

"What do you mean by taking possession of the house?" said Johnny suspiciously, a little alarmed lest his supremacy might be threatened from a new quarter, as his mother intended that he should be.

At that moment, Nelly, feeling that her position might be imperilled by longer absence, came down in a state of perfect suavity and self-possession, with all her little bobs and bows in order, as if she had lived in the house for a month at least, which of itself was aggravating to the ex-mistress.

"Mrs. Robinson had not found time to get a room ready, not hearing till yesterday, she says, so I've just been making the bed," she said, significantly looking at her husband.

"No room for my wife in my own house—what's the meaning o' that?" cried Johnny furiously, veering round immediately to the other side, as his wife meant that he should do.

"I on'y heerd from ye yesterday, and that ye know as well as I do, or better," growled his mother, "what's that for manners?"

"Two days is enow to make a bed in, I should ha' fancied," protested Johnny a little uneasily.

"When ladies is so ready to mak' themselves at home, there's no need for nobody else to put themselves out to do it," muttered his mother.

"And where should I be at home if not in my own husband's house?" said Nelly, with perfect temper and an angelic smile. "I'm sure those muffins smell quite enchant-

ing, and Johnny's so partial to muffins," she went on, sitting down quietly to the table.

"That chit of a thing!" said Mrs. Robinson under her breath, but compelled to pour out the tea by the position as well as by her own thirst. "A standin' up to me!" as she declared afterwards to her friends, "as if she'd a been a duchess's daughter, ithstead of out o' the washtub! And me that is his mother. and money in the concern and a'! But I'll be even with her yet."

It was no bed of roses which Nelly had arranged for herself, but then lofty eminences are known to be often rocky, and steep, and stony. She had counted the cost, and was quite ready to throw over any such trifles as family affection, ease, and a quiet life, which might stand in the way of her elevation. The only thing that really annoyed her was a lurking doubt, as she saw more of life, whether she had done quite as well for herself as she might have done, and whether, with her claims, she ought not to have aimed a little higher than Johnny, and not been in quite such a hurry to settle herself.

CHAPTER XII.

LIGHT AT EVENTIDE.

As time went on Joan saw less and less of her daughter; Nelly was altogether occupied in making good her new position, and in doing battle with her mother-in-law, whom it was no easy matter to oust from the house, without which she felt that her victory could hardly be said to be complete. Johnny veered round and round in his opinion, driven into antagonism always by the last speaker, and with so unstable an ally, there was no knowing how long the contest might last. Mrs. Robinson had no chance with Nelly's quick wits, and her heavy artillery was generally only just in

position before the enemy had got round to her rear ; but there was a slow dull obstinacy about her that did not in the least mind being beaten any number of times, and she was not likely to give up her present vantage ground. In such a state of things visits to the laundry were rather compromising to Nelly's dignity, and she found out that it was her duty to attend to her husband's wishes, and break off with a past so little worthy of her. The world is apt to take a man or woman on their own valuation of themselves, and Nelly's undoubting conviction of her own superiority was fast winning for her her proper place, as she considered it, in her little world, and there was no good in risking matters by looking after her poor relations.

Joan fretted more and more as her daughter's visits grew shorter and further apart.

"Eh, my child !" said she, with an indescribable expression of joy one day when Nelly came into the room, in the most becoming of toilettes, shaking her earrings and the fringe of her parasol as she entered. There was a certain queer coquetry in the way she put on her smartest airs and ribbons to go and see her homely mother and sister. "It is good o' thee to come, dearie," went on Joan, looking tenderly into the fair face which showed no answering tenderness to the asking eyes.

"Robinson's gone over to the great Cheese Fair at Exton, so I thought I'd just run down and see how you were. Amy Rawson brought me in the gig to the corner. Here's a collar I've brought you," said Nelly, unfolding a flimsy bit of work, which would be of the smallest possible use to such a woman as Joan.

"Thank ye, thank ye, it 's very kind," said her mother, scarcely looking at it. "And thou'st happy and well, dear heart?" she went on, pressing her daughter's admirably gloved hand in her own hard and horny working palms.

"Quite so," replied Nelly, in her most proper company one, and smoothing the cuffs which had been disarranged

by her mother's caresses. "Mr. Robinson is all I could wish, and lets me do most things I want."

"A little boring" she might have added, if the whole truth were well to speak either of grocers or things in general.

"And ye wants for nothing, Nelly? He loves thee as he should and as thou'st been used to? We was very fond o' thee at home," said poor Joan, angling for a word of response to the feeling which was burning in her own heart. "And yer mother-in-law, how do ye and she get on?" she added inquiringly.

"Of course, mother, he'd not be wanting in what is my due as his wife, you know, and Mrs. Robinson, senior, will be all right, I 've no doubt."

It is no use to ask the frilled geranium in its painted pot for the shelter offered by the oak, or the fragrance of the bank of thyme—each "after its kind," and Nelly did honour to her education and the ideals which she had built up from the seminary for young ladies about life in general.

"Amy was to call for me, I promised not to stop too long," said she at the end of a quarter of an hour, which was the time she allotted out of her life to the mother whose whole soul had been devoted to her.

"What's the matter with you, Rowan?" she said airily, as she turned to go, and took notice of her sister, who, looking white and ill, was sitting by the fire in strange idleness. "What! your head aches? Mine often aches when the weather is close. Why do you sit by the fire in that way?"

"What, dearie, does thy head ever ache badly?" cried her mother anxiously, "thou shouldst tak' tent to thysen, and see to it. Does Mr. Robinson know? Wilt thee ha' a cup o' tea or summat else for to do it good?"

"Oh, yes, I take care! No tea, thank you, it 's early for tea. I shan't kiss you Rowan, because it might be something catching you 've got, you know," answered Nelly, flourishing out of the room, and just enduring her mother's passionate embrace.

"Shall us see thee agin sometime, when it ayn't ill-convenient?" began Joan.

"Oh yes, some time, but I can't quite say when, I'm so busy just now."

There was a drear look in Joan's face, as she came back again into the house, that went to Rowan's heart; it was like that of a starving man to whom a cream ice and a wafer have been given for food.

"Shouldn't we do better to go back to Scarthing Dale agin, what was home once, mother, or somewhere? We're not wanted here," said Rowan, in a low voice, looking anxiously at her.

"An' what should I do a' that way off o' Nelly?" replied her mother, turning angrily away.

Rowan scarcely needed the rebuff to feel how little she was to her mother, but it fell sadly upon her; she had been feeling ill for several days, and that evening she could hold up no longer, and fairly gave in.

"I wonder what ails thee?" said Joan, roused at last to unwonted interest in her uncomplaining child.

"What! have you been taking in the clothes to wash from Danby's? You 've just washed the fever into you, Rowan," said the old doctor, who had been called in. He had known the girls and their mother ever since they came to live near his gate at their first arrival at Blashfield, and was interested in them all.

The long low fever which followed hung about Rowan for weeks, and, even when it appeared to leave her, her strength did not return, there was no sign of rallying, and she lay, white and helpless, looking like death, scarcely speaking or moving.

"She 's just slipping through our fingers," muttered the doctor, compassionately. "I can't make it out, there seems no spring left in her, and she so young still! New milk every half hour, if it 's only a spoonful. But you must try and rouse her, give her something pleasant to think of and live for; milk 's good, but love 's better. What's become of

that pretty daughter of yours that 's married? Why does she never come near the place? She needn't go into the room, but the sound of her coming to inquire might be good at a pinch."

"She 's got better things to do and think of nor we, and I won't ha' her nigh infection," said Joan stiffly, sore under Nelly's terrified neglect of them in their distress—she would not come within a mile of the house, or even see her mother.

"Better things! I should like to know what better things a girl could have to do! But you've dressed her up like a doll all her life, and I believe she's got a doll's heart inside her fine clothes; she 's all bran! This one is worth fifty of her, and you never seemed to care twopence ha'penny for her! Because she 's ugly, and sallow, and thin, I shouldn't wonder! If she 's to die and you're left alone, without even the doll to comfort you, where will you be? I believe you might save her yet. Make much of her, pet her, feed her as I've told you. It 's your last chance—and that 's a poor one—but you must make haste, I say, you've not an inch of margin to spare."

Joan went back into the room half dazed. There was a power of clear-sighted thought within her, all unused as it generally was, which compelled her to see the truth, however unwelcome and strange, when it was put before her thus sternly.

Why had the contrast between her two children never struck her before? And now perhaps it was too late! thought she dismally, as she hung anxiously over the bed, trying to persuade Rowan to take the milk. "Won't you try, dearie," she repeated tenderly.

The girl roused herself painfully and opened her eyes; she meekly did her best, but seemed unable to swallow.

"For my sake, Rowan," said Joan earnestly, raising her in her arms.

She instinctively strove to obey her mother, but all strength seemed gone.

Then, with an exceeding bitter cry, Joan flung herself beside the bed—"What iver shall I do wi'out thee? Thou 'st been the best child iver born, and the Lord he's taking thee away because I hanna cared enow for thee! Stay a bit longer wi' me, Rowan, and me so desolate, that has none now left to care for me, and we'll go and bide at Scarscliffe, or wherever thou'lt fancy!"

The girl was too weak to speak, but she looked up with wonder at her mother's tone. It was worth the effort to live, if she was wanted, and the fading life within her gathered into her eyes as she gazed into Joan's longing face.

The tide gradually turned for her from that moment; by slow degrees, as the summer came on with the longer days, Rowan began to recover, but she required a change. The laundry business had fallen off, at least for the time, with the dread of fever, and it was easy for them to get away.

"Thee shalt write to cousin Mercy to tak' us in for a bit, 't will do thee good to see the auld place and the auld folk, and then we can see whether to stop on or no," said Joan.

Travelling was not so difficult as when they had first come to Blashfield, and there was a coach even to Scarthing Dale. They found Mercy still nominally superintending the washing for the Hall, deaf and nearly blind as she was, and Nat "doddling" about the garden, stiff with rheumatism.

"Yes, for sure," said the old woman, "and is that you come back again, Joan? ye looks a deal older. I dunno b'leeve as I should ha' know'd ye an' ye hadna wrote—and this is little Rowan; she's not much grow'd neither. What's come o' my brother, is it ye wants for to know? He were niver his own man agin, and just slipped away one morning wi'out much warning like, quite quiet."

"And Douro, he follered him to the grave," added Nat, "all one as if he were a Christian, and there he laid him down and wouldn't stir nor leave the place, a' we could do nor say. We fed him there two-thri days, and then we fund him stark and stiff, lyin' all along the sods where Will were

buried. He loved him well did the dog, and I tak' it his heart bruk."

"Old Madam's alive," went on Mercy, "though she's but a poor crittur, but 'cratchetty gates henges long,' you know they says. I met her i' th' wheelchair t' other day, and telled her as little Nelly made a great match, and she just smiled, and axed for you and Rowan very kind. Mr. Palmer and his lady—her as was Miss Iredale ye mind"—(Joan remembered the group before the hall door on the evening of Lawrence's death only too well) "they comes and stops here a good bit at a time, but the missis don't tak' much delight in nothin', poor dear heart, but just sittin' at the winder lookin' out, all one as if she were waitin' for somebody. 'He'll soon be here, my dear,' she says some days; nurse telled me over and over agin. She ayn't unhappy, so to speak, on'y just so still like, and her thoughts seemin'ly elsewhere."

"I'd give a very deal for to see her face agin," said Joan, sadly, "if 't were on'y for a minute and afar off. She *were* good to me and mine, that's what she were, i' th' auld days. Dye think as there'd be any hurt o' me comin' to bide here, down i' th' village? My heart yearns to th' auld place, there's no home, so to speak, i' that black hole where we stops now. Rowan's just mad for to come back to live here for all she were such a little un when we went away."

"Aye, aye, come ye back agin," answered Nat readily. His heart had warmed at the sight of his old friends; "the quality of mercy," in his case, was exceedingly "strained," and he longed for some relief from his wife's sharp-tempered excellencies. "Come ye back to your own parts, nobody wunna fling that auld story at ye now; t'wernt no fault o' yourn, and you and your wench 'ud run up whiles and ha' a crack wi' me, like auld times. We hanna had a bit o' joy i' th' house not niver sin that day. D' ye mind a little house by the big stones under the auler trees, nigh the bruk, wi' plenty watter for th' washing? Th' auld ooman's just dead as lived there. We'll goo down and ha' a look at it, it

dunno belong to Roland Hill, and I'll speak to th' man as owns it. If we tuk our time I'd get there and back afore tea's macked i' th' pot. And I'll see as Mercy gives o'er some o' th' laundry work to thee; she canna' hold on any-how mich longer wi' it. On'y ye munna think o' th' Hall washing, that wunna be seemly, that ut wouldn't," he added under his breath.

"I dunna hold althegither to thee and thi mither comin' to stop where that there Mark have a done so cruel to th' poor young squire," said Mercy, severely, to Rowan as she watched her husband and his companion start on their leisurely journey.

"I heerd mother say oncst as there was nowt found agin him at the trial," began Rowan, in a frightened whisper.

"Nowt agin him!" cried Mercy angrily, "when he were out poachin' a' that night, and a' about the place for days and wiks, and him put in prison for 't, and every soul knew as he'd a done it! Thee hast niver been nigh the Grey Pool sin thee were a little 'un, just thee goo down and see for theesen. Old Will he marked the place wi' a stone close alongside the watter where the young meester were fund, and left his curse to whomsumdever should move it, he did, and right too! When so be thous't bin there thysen, and seed the pool, and the trees, and the big stones, there where Mark got away, wi' thy own eyes, thee'll niver say agin as he did na do it!" cried Mrs. Gaunt with a nice discrimination as to what constituted evidence. "There, goo child!" she continued, as Rowan hesitated, "there'll be plenty time afore thi mother 'll be back, an thou'lt mak' haste. Turn to th' left at the forking, they've a changed the path a while back."

With a shiver, Rowan did as she was bid. She hurried through the deep wood where the narrow path cut for the shooting wound in and out among the rocks and the thick brushwood. All was silent in the midsummer weather till the roar of waters just below the Grey Pool showed its whereabouts. She came out on the river's brink, where

the clear still water under the high limestone cliffs was apparently resting before its excited plunge. The great leaves were growing luxuriantly on the bank among the mossy stones, the kingfisher and the ousel were flitting to and fro. All was as bright, and enjoyable, and unspoiled as on that long passed day which Lawrence had spent there; not a leaf or flower had faded sooner, not a bird or beast had been troubled because the master who loved them all so well had come to a violent death in the midst of their beauty. Nature seems so unsympathetic to her human children, holding on her mighty course unmoved even by their most poignant anguish. The girl stood for a frightened moment looking round on the lovely scene with its horrible associations, and then hurried home as if the young "meester's" ghost was pursuing the daughter of his murderer.

Joan never knew how the time of her absence had been spent, how many were the sleepless nights which poor Rowan endured in consequence of her expedition, and of the reality it gave to the visions connected with the past that beset her.

The two soon settled themselves in the little old cottage under the great sycamores by the stream at the foot of the hill, and once more took in washing.

Joan was a grave woman, and except with Nelly, in the old days, little given to demonstrations of affection, but no one could see the tall, upright, grand-looking, stern mother, with her dark hawk eyes set in their deep sockets, her aquiline nose and firm set mouth, and the little, thin, sallow daughter always by her side, without feeling how tender and true was the tie between them.

"And at evening there was light" in the little household.

As Joan grew older the lines of the stern face softened; as the outward strength decayed she became gentler and more patient within.

One night, tired with the long day's work, she lay back musing in the three cornered armchair, and Rowan silently

set the little round table at her elbow, and was placing a cup of tea upon it, when Joan looked up suddenly and laid her great hand on the girl's as it touched the chair.

A caress was strange and unaccustomed from her, and Rowan's eyes filled with tears.

"I were thinkin'," said Joan, in a low voice, "o' that there old Methodee I heerd one day at Blashfield; he telled us how once there were a poor man had such a heavy cross laid upo' him, that he could na' put up wi' it nohow. And it seemed to him in a dream as how he come to Jesus, and axed him for to change it for him—any other! only just not that! And the Lord he were pitiful and massiful and He showed him a great place full o' crosses, big uns and little uns, and telled him to choose another for hisself on 'em. And one he found were too long, and another were too crooked, and the rest were summat else wrong, and he could na do wi' none on 'em. And at last he come to one as he thought he could put up wi' and he chose thattun. And lo 't were the very one as he had a laid down. And he woke out of 's dream! And, Rowan, once i' th' auld time it seemed to me as if my burden were bigger nor I could bear, and I rebelled agin the Lord and were stiffneck't i' my misery. And he changed the cross for me, and I were no better pleased, and fretted and troubled just as sore. And now i' my old age th' auld cross is just there but He 've a took a' the bitterness out o' it and my life. What's that about Ruth, dearie? and how she clave to her mother? and where hur lived so would she, and there would she be buried? Thee'st been a good Ruth and a true one to me, child, that what thee hast."

HASTY FEET SORROW MEET.

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CHAPTER I.

THE Nant valley was a strange sight to those who came upon it for the first time, especially at night. The glare of the mighty furnaces mounting up to heaven, and throwing a lurid glow almost to the zenith, the intense blackness of the objects seen near the fierce light, the skeleton stages, the iron tubes, the great sheds, the tall chimneys, as they stood out against the central hearts of fire, the sweeps of white steam rushing from time to time across the dark sky, gave the place an almost unearthly look. It seemed like pandemonium, and the black figures hurrying to and fro the demons disporting themselves in it.

Every now and then a door opened, showing a white excess of heat, and reminding one of the burning fiery furnace which Nebuchadnezzar, the king, had built ; but I did not see "the three children" who sacrificed themselves for their God ; no, nor the angel of the Lord who comforted them. But he may have been there all the same. In these days there is no open vision, and the sacrifices made are by man for man, and not for his faith in the unseen.

The valley stretched far up into the hills, narrow and twisting, one of a network of similar rents, opening one into the other, each with a rapid stream at the bottom. The remains of low forest scrub on the mountain side were gradually retreating before the advance of rows of hideous blackened houses, which were pushing their advanced guard further and further up among the soiled green meadows,

and broken, withering remnants of vegetation. Some few cottages yet remained of the old type, out of reach of the smoke, standing each in its own little croft, relics of a very ancient village at the foot of a ruined castle, which in the old times had protected and oppressed it by turns.

One low thatched house, of a single story only, white-washed as usual liberally, wherever whitewash could stick, upon walls, roofs, and floors, was perched on the steep side of the glen, and stood back from the road, with a bit of stone terrace overrun with fuchsias, and a large sycamore sheltering it, the trunk and the steps whitened also. The door was open, and a woman stood before it looking out into the soft twilight, with the everlasting knitting of a Welshwoman in her busy fingers, and giving an occasional glance back at the baby which lay in a great wooden cradle behind her. She was listening to a stream of vehement talk, loud and long, which came up the line of street, and was heard in the quiet evening, even amid the clanging of the works, softened by distance. She could soon distinguish the voices of her own two, as they came towards the long flight of stone steps which led up to the cottage.

"We will be all out on Saturday, and a jolly good thing too; and the masters will be in a pretty fix then! We will see who shall be tired first!" cried her boy, Ivor, plunging into the room, and nearly upsetting mother, cradle and tea table, in his excitement.

"Don't you waken the baby," said she, as he stooped apologetically over it.

He was a strong, healthy, pleasant-looking lad, about fourteen, a good head taller than his little, gentle, shy mother, who only sighed, without answering him. The dread of the strike had been hanging over her head for weeks, and she knew rather more of what it entailed than did her son.

"It will be a bad job for you and me, and for us all, my boy, that is all I can say," Choicy observed in a low voice,



but quite unnoticed, for Ivor was followed by his father, a shrewd, intelligent-looking man, who carried his head habitually low, and looked up without raising it when he listened, which gave his deep-set eyes a curiously considering gaze, while the anxious lines about the mouth showed how much he took life to heart. With him was a tall young fellow, with rather a better coat, and more English speech than William Howell's.

The two came in talking earnestly, a great deal too much occupied by their news to see or hear any such gentle opposition to their opinion as Choicy was likely to give.

The local branch of the Union had sent up their case to the central committee, and the order to strike had just reached them, as well as the far larger works in the next valley. The iron workers in that district are much less willing to go out than the colliers, on whom, however, the work is dependent for the necessary supplies of fuel. The above-ground men are easier to reach and to argue with than the population under the earth, who are more exclusively Welsh, and hang together, both by language and occupation, in a bond which often amounts to a sort of secret society. Both pits and furnaces were here in the very closest proximity in a retired valley; but the smelting was on a small scale, and, as is now, nearly eaten out by the larger works.

"They have been making shameful profits at the works this six months past, as everybody knows; and we won the trick the last time we were out," cried Barnard Morris excitedly.

"But we were out eleven weeks, and the rise didn't anything like pay for what we lost," said Choicy in an undertone; but no one listened, amidst the din of words—"prices," "finished iron," "steam coal and house coal should be paid for the same, they're as much trouble to raise one as the other," which rang in her ears.

"It's our turn; wages have no business to come down

till prices gets close to the cost of working. We'll have what belongs to us, fair. Even then the masters will have all they made when trade was up," said Howell eagerly.

"Ah. and we 'll have our turn at the fine houses, and the horses and the traps, and things," shouted Ivor jubilantly.

"Hold your tongue, you young fool," replied his father, rather angrily. "Do you think ten per cent. rise will give half a million of men fine houses and traps all round."

No one likes to hear a caricature of his own excellent arguments.

"But every man," he went on, "should have his own four acres of land and a house upon it; I don't see how anybody can say no to that being our right."

"They said at the works to-day that the price of wheels had gone up two months back, and wages had all along been kept down just the same," said Barnard, who had just been put into the pattern shop, where the models in wood for the different castings are made, a work requiring much exactness and some knowledge of mathematical drawing. "But, for all that, Mr. Jones said we'd just been obliged to refuse two good orders, because we couldn't do 'em at the price, and they was gone abroad. Undersold by the foreigner! They 're always dragging in the foreigner when they want to scare us and keep us down! Why does not the foreigner stick up for himself and strike too?"

"And if they do try and get their work done abroad, everybody do know that an English workman will hold his own all the world over, wherever he do go, both for quality and quantity," said Howell zealously, "and the Belgian iron is nothing so good or so cheap in the long run, if they do send for it."

And he began figuring away, as his wife called it, for the fiftieth time at least, at the proportion of wages and prices at home and abroad, while Barnard turned aside to Choicy.

"I thought Cilian was coming back to you this week?"

he asked at last, looking wistfully round for something which he did not seem to find in the very small limits of the cottage.

"No, sister's given up to be here altogether," answered Choicy, quickly. "She has taken a place up at Madam Randolph's, and she did go there on Wednesday."

"Gone to Mrs. Randolph's!" cried Barnard irritably, "what on earth has she done that for, I should like to know?"

Choicy was silent.

"Why, Howell told me he thought she'd be back by to-night," he went on complainingly.

"William doesn't very well know whether he has got on his head behind or before, with all his trouble, I believe," answered Choicy, "but sister have only wrote yesterday to say for certain that she shall stop, and not to come to us no more, however."

Barnard turned away with a gloomy face, hardly putting in more than a word to Howell's vivid account of the scene at the meeting, and the reception of the order to strike received from the head quarters of the Union, of which he was full. "We 're in our rights! Wages should go up as the profits of the masters does," he repeated earnestly, "and nobody could say we 've been having anything like our fair share, even if prices is going down a bit now."

"I shall go up to Bodavon and see Cilian at Mrs. Randolph's," muttered Barnard in a low voice between his teeth.

"Indeed and you 'd better not," replied Choicy, quickly, in the same tone.

"The colliers will bring up their tools on Saturday, and then they 'll see whether we be in earnest or not!" went on Howell, not in the least hearing the bye-play between his wife and Barnard.

"Saturday's uncommon quick to be out," sighed Choicy, speaking to her husband, and evidently wishing to avoid further discussion with Barnard.

The young man turned away towards the door. Although his interest in the great question of the strike was very keen, yet even such interest is apt to grow pale, at five-and-twenty, when a man begins to suspect that his well-beloved is taking very strong measures to avoid meeting him, and that all those convincing arguments which he had been rehearsing for the last month for her special benefit will have to be put by in the caverns of his memory for some future opportunity, which may never come. "And my speech to-night at the Union I thought she 'd care for," as poor Barnard reflected ruefully within himself.

"Stop and have some supper while we have some to give," cried Howell after him, with rather a forced laugh.

"It 's getting late, I ought to be off home," replied Barnard somewhat shortly, over his shoulder, as he strode down the hill with a rather mock-heroic attempt at indifference.

Choicy and Cilian were half sisters, but no two human beings could have been more unlike, both without and within. Choicy was small and slight, with light hair, and grey eyes, and a pale face, shy, retiring, and gentle. Cilian was on a grand scale, tall, with a noble figure and very black hair, which, in those better days before crops existed, was coiled round her head like a crown, and large dark brown eyes, full of passion of loving and hating, most inconveniently strong. She had come to live with the Howells after the death of her father, about six months before, and poor Choicy's hitherto tranquil life had been one continued agitation ever since the girl of eighteen, with her vehement will and her overpowering energy, had come under her motherly wing.

Barnard Morris had fallen in love with her very soon after her arrival at Kefn Glas, and she had endured him for a short time—no milder word could be found for her feeling. She had even gone on a little longer, evidently trying to accommodate herself to his love. She was restless and ambitious, in a sort of ignorant, innocent way, and there

was something pleasant to her in her new fledged power over the young man, while no realizing of a pain which she had not felt and could not understand had troubled her conscience. But latterly, with apparently no fresh reason to account for the change, her sister had been forced to see how positively intolerable his love had become to the girl. She could hardly bear him in the house.

Choicy was grieved ; Barnard was a good, rather clever, very reliable fellow, who was getting on extremely well at the works. The marriage, she thought, would "settle" her sister, and be a very safe and happy arrangement, keeping her within easy reach of the Howell's affectionate care.

A few weeks, however, before, Cilian had gone up the valley, ostensibly to see her grandmother, but, as Choicy well knew, chiefly to be out of Barnard's way, and had now suddenly announced her intention of going into service. Choicy was exceedingly vexed. "She will be very unhappy, and won't know a bit how to do her work. If he hadn't so bothered her she would maybe have stopped with us," thought she. She was, perhaps, unreasonably angry with Barnard, for having driven her sister away by the impatience of his love, and had accordingly received him with very little of her usual consideration and kindness.

Poor Barnard meanwhile went on his disconsolate way to his mother's. She was a widow and kept a little shop in the village of Kefn Glas, where she presided over an *omnium gatherum* of every article that could possibly be asked for, heaped pell mell in every corner of every shelf. Tea, bacon, ribbons, lollipops, shoes, poison for rats, bonnet shapes, shouldered each other in every direction, or were hung up by strings from the roof, so ingeniously contrived, that the whole ropesfull had to come down when any single article was wanted. The tea smelt of snuff, the lollipops of bacon, the ribbons were in constant danger of the lard. You always seemed to have brought away something extra in your parcel, beyond what had been bargained for.

The position of small tradesmen during a strike is

peculiarly trying: they have no free-will in the matter. None of the honours of martyrdom, no heroic aspirations to sustain them under defeat fall to their share, they neither resist reductions nor demand an advance of wages, at the imminent risk of starvation, and the small addition, which is to make up in honour when it comes for the pecuniary loss of so many weeks' wages does not profit them except indirectly; yet the tradesfolk are the first to suffer. They dare not refuse credit, for some time at least, to old customers in distress, and many of them go beyond their means in trying to supply their neighbours and friends. Though it is of course true that they put large percentages on their accounts, yet these do not remunerate them for the long outstanding balances, and the multitude of bad debts accruing at such a season.

Mrs. Morris was a tall, gaunt, grizzled, north-country woman, with a bitter tongue, used to many a hard and canny bargain, but she had not been able to steel her heart against starving women entreating for their children in the hard times of the past strike, and she was still labouring under the heavy weight of unpaid bills. The wholesale dealers had been very forbearing, and had given her long credit, but they had expected her to pay in the end; while the number of her debtors, hopelessly in arrears or insolvent, threatened to swallow up her little trade, and weighed sorely on her mind. All this did not incline her to view with much favour the proceedings of her son, who had been taking an active part in encouraging the strike. He was the apple of her eye, her only child, whom she had petted and scolded, lectured and unconsciously worshipped, ever since the day when she had been left a lone woman with a baby of three years old to strive for herself, after her husband's death in the pits.

"So there, you've got your wish for to ruin us, has ye!" said she, in a high pitched angry tone as he came in. "And how's ever the last strike's bills to be paid, and new scores now to be run up? You tell me *that*, Barnard

Morris? And Davies down for nigh on four pound he haven't paid! And Jones for three more! And sending for things on tick this blessed afternoon they has! I do believe as they does it a purpose, before things is settled, for to put me in a fix."

Barnard did not answer, he scarcely even heard; for a moment even the last meeting of the local committee had lost its charm in his recollection, much more any thought of his mother's wrongs. He had a gift of words, a flow of rhetoric, but somehow he had failed to convince the one person whom most he longed to influence. Even that splendid peroration of his first speech, concerning "the eyes of England, which would look with scorn on the coal and iron workers if they flinched at this moment in the struggle," that he had been repeating complacently to himself on his way home, to offer to his sweetheart as the first fruits of his genius, now seemed to have become "stale, flat and unprofitable."

"If ever there were a man cut off his nose to spite his face, it 's you, Barnard!" said his mother, almost spitefully, 'yarning the wages you does, and gettin' up in the world as you was doin'! You 've a wonderful lot to answer for, if you 've had any hand in persuading them silly folk, that follow like sheep just one after t' other, to go out on strike. And they says the masters will blow out the furnaces sooner or yield."

"It costs nigh on a thousand pound to set each on light again," answered her son, "and there's all the horses in the pit that 'll have to come up, and will be eating their heads off, and the plant and machinery lying idle—the masters can 't stand that game long. Lancasters will think twice, twice, and a good many more times too, afore they risk that. They 'll not dare to, they 'll yield, you 'll see, before the month be out. And now give me some supper Mother. I 'm well nigh knocked up, I am."

"And where 'll your supper be got to, you gouk, before this time month, I 'd like to know?" groaned Mrs. Morris,

as she led the way into the small back kitchen, where the little hot bit never failed for Barnard, while his mother was content with her dish o' tea and some bread and salt butter.

"What, and you 've been up to those Howells again, I 'll be bound? They tell me as that young lass is a-coming back again. She 'd do better yarning her bread after a respectable fashion in service somewhere, ithstead o' coming to set up her top knots and sich like thriftless fashions in this place, where she ayn't wanted."

Mrs. Morris bore a by no means secret grudge against the fair Cilian; and though she knew that it would be wiser not to flout her son about his love, she could not resist aiming her shafts at the obnoxious damsel whenever there was an opportunity.

"Cilian 's not coming back at all," answered Barnard in a vexed tone, "she 's gone to live up with old Mrs. Randolph, up at Badavon."

"Whew!" whistled his mother, "and what 's up now, I wonder? I should ha' thought her ladyship would ha' been too proud to foller other folks' whims, and she with enow o' her own, Heaven knows. She 'd fain ha' played them out here, all to hersen, upo' them as should ha' known better nor to be diddle-daddling after such as she."

Barnard started up, his supper half finished, and rushed out of the house with something very like an oath.

"Stop, lad! stay and eat thy supper, and I wunna say another word good nor bad agin her!" cried his mother loudly, as she followed him, carrying, quite unconsciously, a large fork in her hand, on the prong of which still remained the bit of bacon she was just about to put on her son's plate.

It was in vain, however, that she tried to overtake him; a small hindrance stood in the path, a child of seven or eight, with a whole list of requirements—"If ye please, indeed, I do want a quarter of a ounce of tea, and a penn'oth o' cheese, and two taller candles."

Meals are not bought many hours ahead, particularly in strike time, and the perpetual weighing out of these minute quantities is a great annoyance and trouble to the small shopkeepers; but forethought is not a fashionable virtue among the colliers and iron workers, even for a day's meals.

Meantime Barnard had passed out of his mother's sight, up the steep street, where groups of men and women were talking excitedly round their doors. The road was full of dirty, barefooted children, with towzled hair (chiefly Irish you were always told), who were wallowing in the dust, making mud pies; the women, in striped linsey petticoats, and black bonnets or hats, flattened by the burdens which most of them carry on their heads, were as warlike in their talk as the men, or even more so.

A tall "tip girl," one of a race of amazons whose duty it is to push the cars of slag and rubbish along a rail, and overturn them at the end on the rubble heap, or to pile the lumps of coal and ironstone until they are wanted, was striding down the street declaiming on the smallness of her wages—

"I da work so hard as any man, and why shouldn't I be paid as well?" shouted Rosamond in a voice of thunder. The noise of the works is so great that everybody connected with them gets a habit of talking at the top of his or her voice, even when quite away from the scene of action.

"It isn't *your* wages that wants raising," answered a man in Welsh, with a sneer, "you 're nothing but a woman—it is the puddlers and sinkers that is so underpaid, like me!"

"And why is not a woman to have her rights, too, I would like to know?" answered Rosamond, furiously, turning round with her hands on her haunches to confront her foe. She wore a red handkerchief tied round her head to keep her hair clean—the tip girls are very proud of their hair—and another fastened across it, making a very picturesque sort of turban, while the dark blue bedgown, and short striped petticoat showed the outlines of her great limbs. She looked like one of the giant war women of the

old Norse mythology, as strong and as fearless—"Right 's right, whether it 's for man or woman, and that 's common justice and good sense too, isn't it, Barnard?" said she.

He was appealed to right and left as the friend of Howell the Committee man, and also as the maker of a speech at the meeting. Speechifying is a gift for which the Welsh have always had extraordinary respect, from the days of old, when the Triads declared "music, eloquence, and poetry," to be the chief requirements in a man's education. Barnard had spoken Welsh from his childhood, while he inherited English from his mother, and a certain power accrued to him from his equal command of the two languages in a place and at a time when the "Saesneg" was by no means a general accomplishment.

The talk ran high. Why should the masters make the loss fall on the men, even if prices were falling? They had made untold sums while coal and iron were up, now they might draw in a bit. Besides, who knew whether things were really as bad as they said they were? "Blow out the furnaces! They'd never dare to do it. Let them show their books, and then we shall know what to think; but you 'll see they 'll give in soon enough!"

"He who hears only one bell hears only one sound," says a Swiss proverb, and nothing can be clearer or more easily settled than when all the speakers are of one mind.

For some time Barnard went on dogmatising and prophecying with the rest over the excellence of their prospects, and the dead certainty that the masters would yield, till at last he grew a little tired of his own repetitions and asseverations, with a sort of weary feeling of their possible hollowness. "I 've got an errand up to the foreman's," said he, abruptly, at last, improvising a reason for getting away. He turned up the hill, past the mountains of rubbish, till he reached the overlooker's house, on a knoll above the little colony of furnaces. A few last barrow loads of iron ore were being wheeled along a skeleton stage from the side of the hill, to be tipped into the yawning gulf of flame,

feeding the ever open maws of the insatiable fiery mouths. Mechanical contrivances were much behindhand in those remote valleys forty years ago.

Was it possible that that portion, at least, of the mighty life, feeding thousands of human beings, was coming to a close, and had he really any responsibility in urging on the calmer spirits to risk so uncertain a struggle? Though as to that point he infinitely overrated his own influence.

It was a dull evening, cloudy and quiet, so that the fitful light of the furnaces, pulsating as it did with almost a living motion, to and fro and up and down, was even more conspicuous than usual. In the reaction brought on by his private anxiety, he felt for the first time some doubts as to his own wisdom and judgment; and as he came down, after having delivered his message, and walked home in the still night, he did not feel so sure of victory as he had done in the excitement of the battle of the past weeks. The failure of his love affair with Cilian had certainly not a strictly logical bearing on the chances of the great struggle just beginning, and his opinion as to its success was hardly properly biassed by her having chosen to leave the neighbourhood in order to avoid him; but Barnard was neither the first nor the last instance of a man's private state of feeling influencing his judgment on public affairs.

CHAPTER II.

THE PLAS IN THE VALLEY.

Plas Dhu, the "Black Place," belonging to the owner of the works, was one of the most ancient dwelling houses about, and lying as it did close under the steep hill, almost a mountain, overshadowed with great firs, it amply vindicated its name. It was connected, said tradition, by an underground passage with an old castle which commanded the entrance to two villages, built probably to swoop down

on unwary travellers in the good old days when there was a knight in almost every village of that part of Wales. Perhaps the Plas had been originally a sort of outpost, with a power of defence in its massive stone walls. The rooms were very dark, though the windows were large, for the small lozenged panes of glass, the embrasures four or five feet deep, effectually excluded the greatest part of the light that should have entered by them. The floors were not on the same level with each other, a step up in one direction, two down in another. The house was full of hiding-places, secret stairs, queer dark cupboards in the walls, often ten or twelve feet square, all the awkward picturesquenesses which were very little in favour thirty or forty years ago. The kitchen was one of the most important rooms in the house, large, roomy, warm, and light, with a fireplace like a small chamber, which had two tiers of raised seats on either side of the hearth. In one corner of it stood a bee-hive straw chair, a comfortable defence for the head against the tremendous draughts, the rain and snow, which descended at their liking down the enormous chimney space, open straight up to the sky. In this sat a fiery old serving-man, crippled with rheumatism and completely helpless, but who ruled the household despotically in his mistress's cause. She was the last of an old stock utterly ruined by waste and neglect, and at the death of her uncle, the last owner, the estate had been sold by the creditors to a rising man, who bought it as a speculation with its chances of coal and iron. John Lancaster had fallen in love with the penniless Iseult Davies, who had some rights still remaining over the land, which it was quite as convenient to merge in his own. It thereby justified his marriage, to the commercial side of his mind, as not being an entirely bad bargain, which it was pleasant to him to feel, although he had been as really in love as was in his nature. Violent and rough-tempered as he was, he had always treated his wife with consideration, according to his own standard—at

all events better than any one else of his surroundings. All had gone on at Plas Dhu much as in the olden time; he had altered nothing, partly, no doubt, as he himself thought, out of regard to his wife, and partly from pride in being the possessor of the "big house." The old wasteful ways which had ruined her ancestors were still carried on in the same haphazard fashion. Everybody who came to the place had something to eat or drink at his or her pleasure, and was as welcome to sit or stand, talk or be silent, stay or go away, as if the Plas had been an inn. The heavy door, studded with great nails and with florid hinges stretching almost from side to side stood always open. The great beams, blackened with smoke, were hung with a miscellaneous wealth of food—mutton, hams, tongues, smoked geese, flitches of bacon, dried legs of beef, dangling from iron hooks—and every one who wanted "a bit" cut large slices from the joints as they hung, without giving himself the trouble of taking them down, while no one thought for a moment of finishing what had already been attacked.

"And there is seven of them hams and beefs begun and mauled all at once!" muttered old Ianto as he sat in his fortress, where he was waited on by a kitchen maid like a little king. He looked down on his disorderly realm with a profound sense of his own power and belief in his own usefulness in keeping the establishment in order for the sake of his mistress, seeing her rights and sparing her money according to his lights.

The Lancasters had three sons, who had grown up to man's estate without either discipline or education, doing as they pleased, spending as they pleased, going where and when they liked, except when they crossed the path of their fierce old father, when there was sometimes a frightful struggle between the several untrained wills which half broke their mother's heart, utterly powerless as she was both with husband and sons. In general, each one scrambled for his own hand, each got as much money out

of his mother as he could, after his father had been drained dry, and spent it for his own satisfaction, quite regardless of the wishes or comfort of anyone else.

The spending of money requires a certain apprenticeship and education to do well. It is one of the fine arts which it generally takes a generation or two to learn. The man who makes the money generally has but little pleasure in the result; the acquisition of it has been his object, not its enjoyment. It has not been gained as the means to an end, "he has much to retire upon and little to retire to." The next generation are often utterly lavish and unreasonable, but their sons are to the manner born, and have generally been taught by life itself to use instead of abusing their fortunes; but these had not yet appeared at Plas Dhu.

Poor Mrs. Lancaster had a hard time of it. There was a gentle innate dignity about her, an indolent sweetness, which in an easier position would have had a great charm, and with which she could have done good service; and even now, half-educated as she was, unstable of will, ignorant of life, with no power of carrying out what she thought right, with no real influence over her family, no ability to manage her house or her household, yet not one of her numerous and most disorderly servants would have dared to take a liberty with her. She was a good woman and a generous woman, and no one in need ever came near her without her struggling to afford help, even at the expense of her own comforts and luxuries; but her charities were so done as to be merely pouring water into buckets. No one reproached her, however, with the license of her house; no one felt that she was to blame though her sons were turning out a curse to themselves and to others. "It was not her fault," everyone said.

Her second son had married disreputably, and had lately died with small loss to any one; the youngest was generally wandering about the country, shooting, hunting, frequenting races, but the eldest, Evan, spent a good deal of his time at home. He inherited more of his mother's

disposition than the others, and cared for her after his rather selfish fashion, in return for the passionate affection which she lavished upon him.

The final news of the strike had reached her, as it had done everyone else in the place, but she had no private information about it. Mr. Lancaster had been out all day, besides which he never talked to her of his affairs, and she had heard nothing of Evan since the morning.

She was sitting now in the deep window seat of the dining-room, waiting wearily in the twilight, and expecting sadly the temper her husband would probably bring in. She was a large woman, comely still, and her handsome profile could be seen dark against the grey sky, but a heavy resigned look had crept over her once placid expression, as if there was not much left for her to care for in life, though with all material prosperity apparently around her. The room was wide and low, rich in colour, wainscoted with black oak. An old Turkey carpet lay on the polished boards, and heavy threadbare brocade curtains, red and dim blue, hung behind her head. At one end rose a lofty pillared mantel-piece, reaching to the ceiling, with little projecting brackets and shelves on which stood some beautiful blue jars. At the other end stood a high carved dresser, set out with immense pewter dishes, polished like silver, and as large as shields, while rows of rare old china, which would have fetched its weight in gold at the present day, grotesque jugs hanging to hooks, and plates arranged in patterns, "beaupots," exquisite Chelsea ware with reliefs of flowers, priceless in the eyes of collectors, but much of it spoiled and cracked by her second son in his drunken tantrums, garnished its upper shelves.

Presently she heard her husband's loud voice and heavy tread as he came in, bringing with him the manager of some great works in a neighbouring valley, which were models of the good government Kefn Glas could not show. Mr. Thorne had been the soul of the masters' resistance through all the difficult times of the last strike. He was a

stern, cool-looking man, without an ounce of superfluous flesh on his body, or of loose contending motives in his mind. Conscientious, determined, unswerving, troubled by no doubts, either intellectual or moral, as to any course which he might make up his mind to adopt, who would have ordered up battalion after battalion to win the Redan, if he had had it to do, without shrinking from the necessary slaughter—"the position must be won at all costs"—a leader to whom the men were as pawns, and the cause, whatever it was which had to be gained, the only important thing.

"Bring up the dinner, look sharp about you there! Mr. Thorne's in a hurry!" roared Mr. Lancaster into the kitchen as he passed.

"It's all ready when you are, John," said his wife meekly. "Wherever is Evan that I have not seen him all day?" but in the clatter and scramble of bringing in the food she received no answer.

"So they are really going out?" she added, turning to Thorne.

"A pack of fools to strike on a falling market! And they think they shall frighten us into yielding just now of all times! Why, if they'd timed it to suit us they couldn't have chosen better. It's a certain loss to go on smelting as we're doing now with pig-iron at such rates and rails where they are; it will be thousands in our pockets not to be paying men wages to make more only to stock what we can't afford to sell at present prices. And here are the Belgian firms dismissing their men by thousands, and ours are so good as to dismiss themselves!" said Thorne, hardly speaking to her so much as overflowing with the facts with which he was, as it were, charged.

"It's a hard thing though for some of the masters to have to suck their paws all winter," growled Lancaster.

"I can't conceive how those delegates persuade their poor dupes that a strike can answer just now," went on the manager coolly, helping himself to Mrs. Lancaster's pie.

"It's a very simple sum in addition. They thought they'd gained a great victory last time they won their ten per cent. for five months—eleven weeks they were out. I counted they lost £43,000, and against that's to be set what they gained, about £9,000. That's when they win, and what is it when they lose! A pretty way of making their fortunes. And all the misery they went through into the bargain! Suffered, too, for worse than nothing, for it all helped to bring on the present crisis, one may say."

"Yes, it was a dismal sight," sighed Mrs. Lancaster, "pawning their goods, and the children half starved, and yet the women, some of them, were as keen to hold out as the men!"

"When a woman does take a fancy into her head, she's more obstinate, and 'll hold on harder, than a man, we all know that!" said the manager, laughing; and having shovelled the food down his throat, as indifferently as if he had been stoking an engine, he was now preparing to be gone. "Servant, Mrs. Lancaster, keep up your spirits; good night; it 'll all go on right you 'll see," said he, in a half compassionate tone.

"You 'll send me word first thing in the morning if there's anything fresh up at Maencoch," cried Mr. Lancaster, as Thorne shut the door.

"I can't think where Evan is gone to-night. Why has n't he come in to supper? I must have these things kept hot," said his mother.

His father struck his hand so violently on the table that the glasses jingled again. "He's gone off, and I don't know, and I don't care, where he's gone to!" he muttered with an oath. "Look here!" and he dragged out a large fat pocketbook, out of which he took a long horsedealer's bill, and then another, and another of the same cousinhood, and flung them across the table to his wife. "There, that's what I got to day, with matters going on at the works like this! And he's known it this year and more, since the last strike, and to send me in debts like these

to pay, as if I were made of gold! Money to run out like water and nothing coming in, and outgoings for everything all round, and up and down, as he knows as well as I do! He does nothing, and spends like this here; it 's a scandal and a shame! A vile, mean life to lead, and you may tell him so, Mrs. Lancaster, instead of spoiling him as you do!"

The poor woman took up the bills, her hand trembled, and her eyes were full of tears; the amount was indeed enough to provoke a milder man than her husband at such a moment.

"And you spoke to him about it all to night?" she asked in a low voice.

"Spoke to him! I should think I did! Told him he should n't darken my doors any longer, and he might go where the devil drove, if he pleased, but it should n't be here anyhow, and he must be off and have done with it. I can't pay, and I would n't if I could ever so much."

"And he 's gone away without a word to me," sighed the poor mother, rising to go out of the room.

"You sit down!" shouted her husband violently, "I won't have you stir. As he 's brewed so must he bake! You leave it alone, it 's not your business; you always only make things worse!"

Mrs. Lancaster sat down again, as pale as death, and they were both silent for a few minutes. Presently, after she had reached him his pipe, and prepared his brandy and water, she went on entreatingly. "Let me go, John, I must know what became of him. What harm can it do if he 's gone off already? Let me go and see how it was," she said with a sob.

Whether it was the soothing effect of the tobacco, or a certain ruth at her distress, he made no more opposition. though a grunt was his only answer, and Mrs. Lancaster hurried out the room lest she should again be stopped.

The kitchen door was open, and the tide of talk ran high when she looked in; certainly that evening there were

no lack of subjects for discourse, and company was not lacking either to discuss them—the place seemed as full as it could hold. The din ceased for a moment at the sight of the mistress. “Cattus,” she called to a woman who was standing over an enormous carved oak chest, with a lid so heavy that a man was helping her to raise it; she had a heap of stockings hanging over her arm, and was choosing shirts from its deep receptacle, when she lifted her head at Mrs. Lancaster’s call.

Cattus (short for Catherine), had been Evan’s nurse in the old time. Each child had had its own foster mother, and though all had long left service, and had homes of their own, yet they were in and out of Plas Dhu whenever they pleased, with as undoubted a right and as open a welcome as if it belonged to them.

“Did you hear anything about Mr. Evan before he started?” said the poor mother, leading the way into a small dark room, with no light but from the moon, which was just rising behind the dark firs, and shone coldly and sadly through the unshuttered window. She let herself fall into a great old armchair, and Cattus stood by her, folding up the stockings, carefully, as she talked.

“Yes, indeed, ma’am, I was there when he did get into the trap, after his father and him did have the words, and he drove off as if he had left his senses. He did call to me. that was just coming in at the kitchen door, and did tell me go get his things together, and to send them up to his great aunt’s, Mrs. Randolph’s, if you please, mistress. And I am begin look them out, as the socks was lucky come from the wash, and the shirts, as I knew you would say was to do. And master he did swear at Mr. Evan, and Mr. Evan he did swear at master, there in the open yard, answering him again. But, indeed, my poor boy did not say very much, only grinned with his teeth, and helped them to put the bridle on the horse again. And master he was so angry with the strike and all, it was no such great wonder he was put about.”

Cattus sympathised impartially with both sides to a certain point, which indeed was not seldom the case with the bystanders at Plas Dhu, where both sides were always quite certain to be in the wrong.

Mrs. Lancaster winced, as she felt how every item in the quarrel had become as usual common property, not only to the whole household but to all its guests from the works.

"And I did think," went on the nurse, "how one day when Master Evan was four years old, he was, he did go into just such a passion because he was not let to give away his boots to a little beggar boy. He do know and he do care no more how the money do come nor how it do go than he did then, bless him."

"I wish he were four years old again!" said his poor mother, sighing. "You must tell them to send off another cart with his things to Bodavon, he'll want them to-night."

"Mr. Harold did drive the other trap away with him, did hear them say so in the yard."

"Then they can find something of some sort, surely—"

The stables were full of broken-down horses, none which were ever sold, and of all sorts of gigs, phaetons, buggies, without a single decent carriage among them.

"The shafts do be broke in the gig, and there's a pair loose in the wheels of the shandry, and the grey mare is too lame to go so far, for I've asked all round, and the gentlemen has had the rest out all day." Cattus knew much more of the state of the stables than did her mistress; indeed, if Mrs. Lancaster could have joined the party by the kitchen fire, she would have learnt many things about her own family of which she was ignorant, as is probably the case with many of us with regard to our concerns. In her circumstances, however, though ignorance was anything but bliss, it would probably have only been folly to be wise.

"Then we must wait till to-morrow, and I hope Harold will take them himself to his brother when he gets home," replied Mrs. Lancaster, unwillingly, as she lit a

andle and began to see how much money she could lay her hands upon, up and down, to send to her prodigal son. Cattus held the light, while her mistress hunted in the drawers of the big black oak bureau, and then on the shelves of the closet in the wall, and again in a great box with brass hinges, which always stood open, out of which she collected some five or six pounds, without ever dreaming for a moment, any more than Cattus herself, that her maid could be in the way, or that her search needed to be kept secret.

"Dear me, Missis, do you remember when your great uncle, Mr. Davies, that owned the Plas, was alive, how he used for to hide his money in the jugs and the teapots on the dresser in the kitchen. And then he used for to say when they did ask him to give, 'You just go and look into the fourth jug, the blue and brown one, that is on the third row, and take what you shall be find inside.' And there was nobody ever thought to touch it unless he sent them for to look! Dear, dear! They would so soon go for to drown themselves," said Cattus, smiling sadly at her own picture of virtue in the golden age.

"He was a very good man was my great uncle, there is nobody left like him now. And so were all the people then, so! It would n't do to leave the money up and down like that now-a-days I 'm thinking," and Mrs. Lancaster sighed. Her millennium also lay behind her, she was a born conservative.

"There is some things that is better now, however," observed Cattus, consideringly, "bread will be cheaper, and calicoes is come down since them days."

"They were happy times though, when there were no strikes, and the sons did as their fathers bid them," said Mrs. Lancaster, plaintively.

"Well, it shall be very true about the strikes, perhaps, but as for the sons, they shall be always much of a muchness, seems to me, ever since Absolom and a lot more of 'em crossed their fathers. Ishmael nor Esau was n't much

of a comfort to theirs neither, I take it! And the fathers, for the matter of that, had their own selves for to blame a bit most times; at least I know as David might have laid a deal to his own charge, when he come to think how he 'd played 'bout his son, as praps he did by times. He 'd done some queer things, had David," said the impartial Cattus, meditating on historical parallels as she spoke.

CHAPTER III.

THE SHE BEAR'S DEN.

EVAN had driven off smarting with rage at the thought of his father's violence before so many witnesses, and stung to the quick by the remembrance of his own folly. Still, anybody and everybody except himself seemed to him to be to blame, as he ruminated over all that had brought him to such a pass. If he could have persuaded his mare to move a little faster things would not have been so bad—rapid motion is a great comfort under unpleasant thought—but she had been out all day and was dead beat, while the road up the valley was one long and steep ascent, "on the collar" almost all the way, to an old aunt's house at Bodavon, some nine or ten miles off, where, being nearly penniless at the moment, he had resolved to go. He was generally a merciful man to his beasts, but he now urged old Bess along beyond her powers, till at last she refused to go out of a walk. He chafed more and more as the pace grew slower and the darkness increased. The moon, which had been shining a few minutes before into his mother's room, had gone behind the clouds, and in the stillness of his forced inaction, all the past seemed to grow unpleasantly distinct to his mind.

"The beast!" he muttered to himself, as he recalled the horse-dealer's sins of every description. "If he 'd had any

sense he 'd have known I should never go near him again ! To send in his bill at such a time ! " And then he could not help allowing even to himself that the score had been running on for years, and that on the eve of a strike, and centing mischief from afar, " a vulture as he is," it was not wonderful that the man should put in his claim at once. And then all the items of the little bill came back into his head with most disagreeable particularity—the fine hunter, for which he had agreed to pay extravagantly, and which turned out to have a sprained shoulder—and the dealer's severations that she was perfectly sound when sold. The Las Dhu stables were far too carelessly kept for him to be able to prove anything as to the state of its inmates, and after a great deal of wrangling, the fine hunter had been exchanged for another horse, with, of course, an added consideration. Neither sum had ever been paid, and interest was now charged on both. Then came a series of those unfortunate bargains which men who are gaining their experience in horseflesh go through with such exemplary perseverance—the "sand cracks," and the "splints," and the bad eyes, which distinguish each fresh piece of perfection. Moreover, there was an episode where his fatal goodnature had stepped in, and he had become surety for the price of another horse, to oblige a friend. "And that treacherous Sprott has never paid me but five pounds out of fifty in two years ; a pretty fellow ! " It was not a pleasant review. And the coachmaker's and harness bills, and the carrier's long account, which had filled up the measure of his father's wrath, seemed to burn in his pocket as he angrily rumpled the bundle of papers, a copy of those which Mr. Lancaster had shown him in the stable yard. The news of the strike had brought down every tradesman upon him, and they had all carefully taken the precaution of sending their demands in duplicate to both father and son.

He got down at last, partly to ease his poor mare, and partly to walk off his irritation, and at length reached the turn to the old house at Bodavon, when he felt, more than

saw his way, in the half light, through the narrow lane to the gate, and then on, among the laurels, up to the dark evergreen porch, where he struck the handle of his whip against the door, and rung the bell smartly.

It was not safe to take liberties with his particular old aunt, and it was so long since he had paid her a visit, that he did not dare to risk the familiarity implied by driving at once to the back of the house and the stables.

The door opened, and a tall figure, with a lamp in her hand, appeared in the opening. She held the light high over her head so as not to dazzle her eyes, and looked earnestly into the darkness without to see what guest could dare to arrive at such an unwonted time of night. The beautiful attitude and outline, large and full, against the deep rich colour within of the lighted old red hall, looked like a picture by Giorgione, set in the heavy black frame of the porch, hung all round with long garlands of ivy and Virginia creepers.

"Cilian," cried Evan with sudden delight, and seizing her disengaged hand, "are you living here? I never heard that you had come to Bodavon!"

She did not answer, but drew back a little into the house, and he could not see the expression of her face in the shadow.

"Go in, will you, and tell my aunt that I 'm come, and that I want her to let me stay a few days here. Make the best of it, won't you, Cilian? that 's a good girl," he went on excitedly, "and I 'll take the horse round and come in by the kitchen; I suppose I shall find somebody afoot. Say that I 'll explain all about it to her in a minute, when I get in."

She closed the heavy door in silence, and he hurried on with his tired steed, who, however, had scented food and rest, and was no longer unwilling to move. After he had knocked up a gardening lad, who came out yawning, and had safely disposed of the mare, he returned rapidly through the back premises with much more alacrity than he had felt

before, along a dark passage, and then through the little old red hall to a comfortable room, where sat old Mrs. Randolph in state, in a great armchair, by a fire, warm as the evening was, with a large Newfoundland dog by her side, looking extremely grim, dry, and unmitigatedly repellant.

"It is some time since I have had the honour of a visit from you, Mr. Evan," said the old lady sternly, as she composedly went on with her knitting, and hardly troubled herself to look up. "Gelert, *you* hold your tongue! You've nothing to do with the matter," she added, turning round upon the dog who had begun to growl at such an unwonted interruption. "Cilian, look here, there's a stitch dropped somewhere. Do you take it up for me," she went on, turning to the girl, who stood beside her, with her back to the door at which Evan had entered, and did not lift up her head.

"Yes, aunt, it is a good while—so much the worse for me, as it happens," replied Evan, rather nervously.

"And to what do I owe the pleasure of seeing you now, wonder? There certainly must be some most excellent reason on your part, for I have not asked you, that I now of?" enquired Mrs. Randolph, setting her dry bony hands on the two arms of her black oak chair, and looking as hard and impenetrable as the wooden cherubs carved on its back.

It was evident that it would not do to let her go on any longer in this strain; in another moment he saw the risk of being sent altogether about his business, after which he would never have been allowed to enter the place again. To make her feel that he was telling the truth, and the whole truth, as to the reasons which had brought him there, was clearly the only chance that remained of mollifying the old lady.

"I know I've neglected you shamefully, Aunt Randolph. I never came near you till now I want something of you; but my father and I have had a breeze this evening about some bills, and he swore that —."

"Cilian, you may go," interrupted the old lady, stiffly, stopping him. Then, as the girl left the room, she observed, coldly, "I don't see why, because you manage to let every man, woman, and child, every errand boy, and every servant maid into your squabbles at Plas Dhu, you should inform all the world about them so liberally up here. Well?" she went on, bringing those uncompromising hands of hers down upon her knees, for Evan continued silent, trying, as he was, to catch the expression of Cilian's averted face, which she had not turned in his direction as she left the room. "You 'd better get on a little faster if you 've got anything to say to me. I don't think your news will improve by keeping. Humph!"


"Well, Aunt Randolph, I 've been a confounded idiot, and I 'd better say so at once. I 've got into debt about a pack of horses and such like, and the dealer, and the coach-builder, and the farrier have sent in their bills to my father without saying a word to me, just when the strike was about to begin, and he cut up rough, and as good as turned me out of the house."

"And that poor soft, your mother, what did she do, I wonder? Cried, I suppose, and begged pardon all round, and said it was her fault, I 'll be bound?" ("Poor mother," ejaculated Evan, half to himself.) "Poor mother? I should think she was, indeed! A foolish woman that can't say her soul's her own, though she 's my own niece, and should know better," went on Mrs. Randolph. "And then?"

"We were in the stable yard, I 'd only just come in, when my father ——" Evan began.

"What, and all the stable within hearing, and enjoying the sight and sound of the battle royal betwixt my master and his eldest son!" observed his aunt, with a contemptuous snort.

"He would not let me go into the house," said Evan, replying to the easiest part of her questions, "besides, it was quite as well not to see my mother just then, and my father in such a rage."



"And leave her to bear the brunt of it all alone, eh? What, you can come over her better when you 've got her to yourself some time, eh?" said the old lady, knitting on furiously and frowning till her great grey eyebrows almost met. "I think, for once, your father was perfectly right. Unless he takes some strong measures with you all, the whole family will be in the workhouse soon, from all I hear, in spite of all the precious stuff you get out of the ground, which might be so much dirt for any good it does *you*. If you were set to get your own living you 'd be a better man, Evan Lancaster. I wonder you ayn't ashamed of yourself! And then to come sponging on relations that you 've took no notice of scarcely for years, as soon as you want something —."

"Well, if that 's all you 've got to say to a fellow who comes to you for help at such a time, and who has thought nearly as hard things of himself as you have for him, I'd better go," said Evan, angrily. "I won't be told a second time that I sponge —." And he began indignantly making his way towards the door.

"You stop where you are, Evan Lancaster! If you can 't stand hearing the truth told you when you 've only yourself to thank for upsetting your own cart, and finding yourself sitting up to the knees in the mud for your pains, you 'd best learn to behave so as not to want any help, else the sooner you swallow your pride the better, when you ask other folk to serve you! But blood 's thicker than water, and you may stop here a few days, and look about you, if that 's what you want, and see what turns out to be done." She had worked herself into a better humour by feeling how much the best of the argument she was having throughout, and now, having let off the steam of her wrath felt considerably better. "I dare say you 've hardly got a farthing piece in your pocket to get you a dinner and a bed to-night," she ended, determined to shew that she very clearly appreciated the situation.

"Half-a-crown and a ten-shilling bit," said Evan, bring-

ing out his fortune, "so, you see, I need n't turn footpad to-night, at least, for a living. Come, auntie, make peace, won't you, and say you forgive me this time, till I 'm a bad boy again," he went on, with a smile and a certain grace which he inherited from his mother, as he stooped over the old lady and gave her a sounding kiss, while the dog came close up to him and thrust his nose into his hand, a caress which he almost unconsciously returned.

"You may go into the kitchen and tell them to send in anything to eat they can lay their hands on; it won't be much at this time of night. Why, it 's ten o'clock, and all sensible people going to bed!" grumbled Mrs. Randolph, preserving her own gravity, however, now with some difficulty. But a minute after, when he had left the room, she sighed to herself half aloud.

"He 's wonderfully like his poor mother; he 's got just the very trick of her smile. I wish he had n't, then I could treat his father's son as he deserves."

She had never forgiven her niece for her marriage, and had always been on the coldest terms with Mrs. Lancaster ever since what she considered that disastrous event in her family.

"But Gelert thinks well of the lad, that 's clear, and takes to him," she consoled herself by thinking. She set great store by her dog and his intuitions. "And Gelert 's one that knows a great deal, and I 'd trust you sooner than many that go on two legs; would n't I, old dog?" she ended, stroking his head meditatively, as she sat with her keen old eyes under their shaggy eyebrows, striving, as it were, to peer into the future that lay so dark before them all.

CHAPTER IV.

AT THE OLD CASTELL DHU.

It was by no means the first time that Evan had met Cilian. Behind the Howell's house was a steep rocky slope, to which clung a beautiful garment of yellow gorse and pink and purple heather in summer, where nothing but a few active sheep could possibly find a living. Still higher up, however, the hillside was a little less precipitous, and a few blades of grass might be picked up by a very industrious and hardy little cow, such as had just been bought by the Howells.

Cilian had undertaken to see after the milking, but after the advent of the last baby her sister had been very ill, and, as the only nurse, the girl had not been able to leave the house, and the milking had been done by deputy, until one lovely evening, when a neighbour came to sit with Choicy, and she took advantage of her liberty for a climb on the mountain with a pail in her hand.

The long village, black and dismal, increasing every year in size, stretched along the valley on each side a stream, which, after dashing among the big boulders and the beautiful trees further up the pass, came down to form a dirty stagnant pool in the middle of the houses. The big-mouthed furnaces, the long sheds, the rolling mills, the workshops, and the bridge, looked like the buildings in a Dutch toy box from her lofty eminence, and the men and beasts like the creatures in a Noah's ark.

She did not, however, trouble her head in the least with the view, but went on in search of the cow, threading the small green sheep-walks, which wound in and out among the gorse, now in its scented beauty; the tall heather, not

yet in bloom; and the curled heads, like bishops' crosiers, of the sprouting bracken, with which the ground was overgrown.

As she brushed along, she disturbed nest after nest of larks just going to roost—it was a favourite spot for their breeding, in the pure and delicate upland air. Little flights of infant birds rose together in afright, and then hid themselves again under the cover. Every now and then she watched a parent bird rising higher and higher in the beautiful bright glow of the sky till it was quite out of sight, though the song could still be heard—

And singing still dost soar,
And soaring ever singest.

Then with a sudden drop it came to earth again, and went quietly to roost with its little ones.

Presently she could see a large hawk rising out of the trees in the valley below, with its wide flapping wings, mounting rapidly into the sky. There was still a lark on the wing which had not yet seen the foe; while poised in the upper air, now motionless but for its quivering wings, waited the destroyer. She watched it breathlessly; suddenly came the downward swoop, but the lark had now caught sight of its danger, and skimming away with a wonderful swerve, within an ace of death, it gained the shelter.

Greatly relieved, Cilian turned to her milking. "But I do know very well that he 'll come back again, and not so very long first," she sighed to herself as she turned to the cow. After her pail was filled she looked wistfully after some cowslips on the other side a broken wall, which she spied in a large green meadow a good way below her, though still on the summit level. The ground was tossed about into miniature hill and dale, and in the shelter of the hollows there grew groups of beautiful trees. It looked more like a park than a mere field. "Choicy's so fond of cowslip wine, so I will make her some," thought she, and, hiding her little can under the bushes, she climbed over a

ach in the wall, and walked on towards the ruins of the castle standing at the other end, which had once sub-
ated and defended the pass. On the opposite side it rose
most sheer from the valley below, and in many places the
k and the masonry were quite indistinguishable, the
ong cement of those early days having bound the indivi-
al stones into a mass as solid as the rock itself. At one
l a landslip, or perhaps a cannon-shot, at the time of the
ditional Cromwellian attack which ruins are always said
suffer from, had carried away part of a round tower in a
ck, while the upper part remained suspended in air with
support whatever from below. Year after year it hung,
hout so much as a crack, with no sign of giving way or
opping to pieces. There was a strange difference in the
ughts of the builders of those days whose work seemed
ended to last for ever, and the ambition of the modern
use-maker whose row is thought to do him credit if it
ts even thirty years—one generation !

The walls were enormously thick, the slits of windows
y narrow, the place must have been one of great strength,
pregnable indeed at the time it was constructed, com-
nded by no neighbouring height, not to be scaled in
nt, and well defended from behind ; but the owners,
pecially the women part of them who stayed at home,
st have had a dismal abode, mewed up in those dark and
row precincts.

Cilian strayed on after her cowslips, which were growing
rrily up and down the now harmless scarps and counter-
urps, the (to her incomprehensible) signs of former warfare,
ich still might be traced on the only assailable side of
e walls, though the mounds were now nearly worn down
d filled up. She walked slowly round the little grass-
own court within the castle walls, surrounded with its
melated buildings, and began to scramble after a bunch of
ld yellow wall flowers, which grew high up on a crumbling
: of wall, just beyond her reach, as, somehow, the most
autiful flowers generally contrive to do. Suddenly she

HASTY FEET SORROW MEET.

started, as a man with a gun on his shoulder came through an opening in the side. He was one of the owners, she perceived at once, and she drew back annoyed, for the Lancasters were known to be extremely jealous of man, woman, or child belonging to Kefn Glas infringing on their property. There was a constant warfare going on at the seasons of nests and eggs, of blackberries, and of mushroom picking; when the irrepressible youngsters of the village forced their way over the walls and under the fences, through the woods and up the precipitous rocks. The keepers must have been more than ubiquitous to keep out the assaults of the infantry on all sides at once, over and above the more serious poaching going on among the elder men. It was Ivor's favourite crime to scale Castell Dhu, which continually vexed his mother, and Cilian frequently heard of its delights from him. There was something of the charm of a forbidden pleasure to her in thus plunging in among the ruined overgrown solitude of the place.

Evan came up angrily towards her. "Don't you know that my father does not allow trespassing—you disturb the game?" said he in an irritated tone, while he was still some way off.

"I was only picking a few cowslips," replied Cilian in a low voice. "Choicy is very fond of cowslip wine, and she is not so very well."

As she spoke she took up the hat which she had hung upon an elder bush, while she was reaching after the wall flowers, and prepared to come down from her perch. Unexpectedness is said to be a great element in pleasure, and the sight of her in her bright young beauty, standing among the stern old grey walls with all their harsh and sad associations, was full of pleasant contrasts. Evan might have met her in a crowd and scarcely noticed her; but here, alone among the ruins, he thought he had never seen so handsome a girl in his life.

"Let me get those flowers for you," said he, most incoherently, and he not only climbed up after them, but ma

his way along a narrow line of partition wall, crowned with loose unsteady stones, and with nothing whatever to hold on by, in pursuit of another bunch that waved high and enjoyingly in the air, which he ruthlessly tore up by the roots, and spoilt for ever, to be flung aside like a weed after a moment's enjoyment.

"Oh, don't you go up there!" cried Cilian from below, watching him anxiously, "it's not safe, and the stones is sure to give way—and just to seek after nonsense like that," and she put her hand over her eyes as he stumbled on the slippery moss.

"Who did you say was fond of cowslip wine?" said he, with a superior smile as he reached the ground safely and gave her the flowers.

"My sister," answered Cilian in a low voice, preparing to be gone.

"What, you 've come lately to live here with her," hazarded Evan, "I 'm sure I never saw you before in Kefn Glas."

"About four months ago," said the girl laconically, walking away now in good earnest out of the castle bounds and across the park meadow.

But the string of her highlow shoe had come untied in her scrambles, and she stooped to fasten it, for the leather ears fell in her way as she walked. The women in those parts are very particular about their tight black stockings, knitted with homespun wool, and their well-fitting shoes, laced over the instep, and tied with a black ribbon bow; and Cilian's trim little feet and neat ancles were only a particularly good specimen of the produce of the hill country. Her hands shook in her hurry to be gone, the ribbon had slipped from its hole and she huddled all up into a knot with her trembling fingers, while Evan still kept by her side amused and interested.

"I came up to look after that hawk, which has been plaguing the partridges," said he. "Did you see it from the hill?" But she could not be won to more speech even by

the hawk. "Won't you tell me your sister's name?" enquired he at last, persuasively.

"My brother-in-law don't like me to talk to nobody, nor don't my sister, not when she 's not —." In her confusion she entangled herself in her negatives too much to go on further; she felt, without looking, that Evan smiled, and she blushed up to her eyes.

They had now reached the boundary, half hedge, half wall, full of ferns, hidden with ivy and lovely creeping plants, among which she had hidden her little can of milk. There was a certain shelter from the old thorns and pollard oak, but the crest of the hill was far too public a place for comfortable conversation.

He stood and watched her as she hurried down the steep hillside. It was growing dusk, the night had faded out of the sky as she disappeared, and he thought she seemed to take the glow away with her.

When she reached home she found Choicy and the baby both very ailing. She was vexed with herself for having been so long away, and was not at all disposed to mention her encounter with Evan, but for all that she put her flowers carefully in water in an old broken blue jug.

She was trying to make up the nearly extinct fire when Ivor arrived from his work at the carpenter's shop, and began to find fault with everything she had done and not done. He had a sort of chivalrous reverence for his weak mother, and a pride in helping her, which had shown itself almost ever since he could walk. There was a constant antagonism between him and his young aunt, who "brought a deal of trouble with her" for mother, and took upon herself a deal too much," he thought.

"And you to let the fire get so low, and put the coal like that there; do you think the water will ever boil like this here?" said he, indignantly, beginning to set everything to rights, according to his own better lights. "And I don't believe you 've got water enough in the kettle, and 't will all burst and blow up my mother along with it!"

"Why don't you bring in better wood then for to make it burn?" complained Cilian. "Those bits of fir spit so, they burn holes in the clothes when I do hang them out for to dry. I do b'lieve you steal them off of the Castell banks, too, instead of fetching them from the carpenter's, as I did tell you many times."

"You do always have something nasty to say to me," retorted Ivor, "the 'ood is good enough, and a man has n't got no time to go after such stupid rubbish as you do want with such a lot o' 'ork as I am 'bliged to look to, and so much on my mind," said he importantly, and skilfully avoiding any question as to the whereabouts of the origin of the fir branches.

"A man!" laughed Cilian, contemptuously, "four feet high! You 'd better make haste and grow before you do talk so big."

Ivor darted a lofty glance of withering scorn at his enemy, who was about twice as tall as himself. "It is n't always the big 'uns that is the best 'uns," he muttered.

"Don't you two quarrel so," said poor Choicy from her big chair, soothing the baby, "Sure you both do do the best indeed for me."

But, for all that, it was to Ivor that she appealed for help when she wanted it as the more capable nurse of the two.

There was much to do at home, and Cilian's days were so completely filled that it was long before she found time to go up the hill side again, and the little cow had again to be milked by deputy. At length, after ten days or so, she seized upon a vacant hour one evening for another climb. She reached the high summit, very much out of breath with the rather unnecessary haste she had made, and sat down to rest on the broken wall. There was no active figure with a gun in sight, and she looked up to the common and into the wood and along the castle walls in vain—there was no one visible.

"And I 'm so glad!" said she to herself, but her gladness had a rather disappointed ring in it.

After she had finished her milking, she strayed into the little fir wood and began picking up the small cones which she had reproached Ivor for touching. Beyond it lay some lovely high-lying fields and copses, into which she looked wistfully, but still in vain. She was just turning slowly to go back when she was startled by a voice just behind her.

"So you 've taken your time before you came back for your cowslips, and now they 're all withered, Cilian! You see I 've learnt what your name is, and your sister's too. I hope Choicy is quite well and has made her cowslip wine," said Evan, laughing, as he scrambled across the fences and brambles and stones towards her.

Cilian turned with a vivid blush on her cheeks, and a smile which she vainly tried to conceal. A strong feeling that she ought not to be there, however, suddenly beset her, and she began industriously to make her way back towards the path. She was like a child, frightened at having got the very thing which she longed for.

"What! Do you burn the fir apples?" said he, picking some up. "My mother likes them down at Plas Dhu in the fire place with the big brass dogs in her own room. I used to bring them in for her when I was a boy."

There was considerable curiosity, both good and ill natured, in the village concerning the doings at Plas Dhu, and Cilian was much interested.

"They do say your mother eats off silver and gold," said she, in an awe-struck whisper.

"I 've never seen the gold, and precious little of the silver, either," answered he, laughing, "I only wish I had! Do you mean the big pewter dishes on the dining room dresser, I wonder?"

"And they do say that you can't count the ponies breeding on the farms in the mountains, they 're so many that Mr. Lancaster have got, and more every year!"

"Ponies are not cash, in Wales at least, the more 's the pity," said he, leaning against the stone wall by her side and

arranging the cones in her handkerchief for her. "We can't live on ponies."

"But when he's so rich," hesitated Cilian, "why should your father give the workmen the bigger wages that William Howell and the rest say they shall strike for? And William, that's been at Kefn Glas so long, and knows that's right. Mr. Lancaster has got so much, and how could it make any difference to him the few shillings more in the week that would do so much for Rosannah and one of them to buy good clothes and things?" said the girl, lifting up her beautiful eyes to Evan as he stood a little above her. She was determined not to lose such an opportunity of impressing the truth on a listener so evidently open to conviction.

"But, Cilian, a few shillings all round, and all the year round, would mean a great many, and if William Howell is he your brother-in-law?) has been here so long, he knows how much was sunk in the pits and the furnaces before every father got a penny out of them. He's not rich at all!" and a twinge of remorse came over Evan as he thought how he had gone on all his life, as if his father's wealth was boundless. "If you risk big fortunes in a hole you may get a bigger fortune out of it, like the Horwoods over the hill, or you may chance to leave them there altogether; the smaller works don't much more than pay their own way." He felt a glow of pride at having put the case so well. He had never thought it out so plainly before, but his own excellent arguments made him feel a little uneasy at his own past conduct. "Now give me some milk out of that can," he said, glad to change the subject, "it's much better than I can get down at the Plas. I've been after that hawk gain, and I'm very thirsty."

"That there does n't shoot off of itself, do it?" enquired Cilian, looking askance at the gun which he had rested against the stones, as she dipped the cover of his flask into the milk.

"Do you think it's alive?" laughed he. "Look, here's

the telescope that I watched you through coming up the hill ; are n't you afraid that will go off too ? What, must you be going already when you 've only just come ? When shall you be up here again ? Does n't the cow want milking every day while it 's up here on the common ? " repeated he, keeping by her side until they reached the edge of the little wood, when she made her escape, with blushing cheeks and an implied promise to return.

That promise was fulfilled, and it was the third or fourth time that the two had met on the hill, where it now seemed to Cilian almost as natural to find Evan as one of the fir trees themselves.

He had been, she thought, particularly friendly and kind, and their talk had lasted longer than usual when she started up to return home.

" The time do go so quick up here," she said, sighing, " I don't know where the minutes gets themselves to, rampaging away as if even they 'd got such lots of things to do waiting for them down there, at the bottom of the hill, like me, I 'm thinking."

" It 's you who are always in such a hurry, not the minutes, answered Evan, laughing, " why can't you sit still and be easy and not think, like me ; what ever is the use of thinking ? And I 'm going away this week for some time, and you won't see me again for ever so long, so we must just make use of the time."

" Going away ! " said Cilian, with a long face.

" Oh, I shall be back again soon, only the present is always best for being together, and for everything else, too, is n't it ? Sit down again, that's a good girl, I 'm sure your sister can wait a bit longer."

But the mention of her sister carried the day ; Cilian could not be persuaded to stay, and prepared to set off down the steep hill path, while he helped to steady the can of milk on her head, and filled her handkerchief with the little cones. She went tripping lightly down the rude steps, made by the roots of the fir trees, followed by the pleasant

knowledge that he still stood where she had left him, watching her steps through the grove. The evening sun was now shining through it with long slanting beams, touching the cushions of green moss and the red trunks of the trees, and, full of her own pleasant thoughts, she was singing a little low song of happiness to herself, which came bubbling out in the fulness of her feeling almost unconsciously, till she came in sight of her sister standing at the door with an anxious look on her face, waiting for her as she came down through the dark trees where the setting sun could not now reach.

"Cilian," said she, as the girl drew near slowly, unwilling to have her bright visions dashed by the provoking realities of anything outside the inner life she was so engrossed in, "who was that man I did see with you but now there in the wood, at the top of the mountain?" Choicy had been too ill to get out and about before, and had only just begun to see what was going on outside her own dwelling. "It did look like Mr. Evan," she went on, "and if I could see you, dear, there is other eyes that shall see so well as me that will not think so kindly not at all of what you shall do."

Cilian was silent. She was very touchy at any interference with her concerns, as her sister knew only too well, and particularly resented any assumption of authority over her independent actions.

"There, don't you be angry with me," Choicy went on, "if I do ask you if it is the first time as you has met together, you and Mr. Evan, all this time as I have been laid by, dear. You mean no harm, heaven knows, no more nor the baby there in the cradle, but Mr. Evan is n't one, not by no means, for such as us should have any familiarity with, no, indeed. And I 'd rather not that people should say my sister had any dealings with him."

"No one did ever say anything but good of Mr. Evan," answered Cilian, shortly, "but I do have no dealings with him, only his drinking some milk, and me getting cowslips

and fir cones, and such like on his father's ground. And the wallflowers was too high for me to pick for myself up at the Castell, and I did n't ask him to do it, but he would. And no harm, either, nobody could n't say there was," she ended, angrily, having let out much she had not intended to tell of their intimacy, and far more than Choicy liked, or, indeed, expected to hear.

"Leave them all, my darling! Don't have nothing to do with them nor him! Them 's flowers that has a bitter taste for all they look so pretty in the hand. I 'll manage about the milking, and the little cow and all, if you shall think better of not going up the hill any more to the Castell," said Choicy entreatingly, her eyes filling with tears.

"Don't you vex! I 'on't go up any more if you don't like it," answered Cilian, suddenly losing her pouting looks, and kissing her sister on the forehead. "Come you—I 'on't give nobody cause to say nothing against me."

There was a great charm sometimes in her April moods and unexpected changes of temper,

"variable as the shade
By the light quivering aspen made,"

but very hard to deal with.

"Thank you, dear," whispered Choicy, still half crying, "I am so much older than you, and have lived here so long, and I know what bad tongues there do be in the town, and it would break my heart to hear them talking like that about you."

"Nobody shan't talk, and Mr. Evan, he 's going away for a time, too," repeated Cilian with dignity.

"What 's that you 've got in your handkerchief?" cried Ivor, coming up. "Oh, indeed, then, it is no odds for *you* to take the fir cones, I suppose! but you will let nobody else have nothing to do with them up at Castell!"

"They was given to me," said Cilian, rather grandly, quite heedless of what questions she was bringing on herself.

"And who did give them to you, I wonder? Who's any right to give you any of them? There is nobody but Mr. Lancaster, and you have not seen Mr. Lancaster, I will be bound. You do do enough to send you to Aber jail, if I did choose to tell of you. You do waste your time looking after me doing wrong, and you do not mind yourself, that is what you do not!" cried the boy, hotly.

"Ivor, you go and look after the pigs," said his mother, coming to the rescue, though she could not help laughing, "that's *your* duty anyhow, and then you may see better to tell us ours."

"You do do your duty always, mother, and no one has any cause for to tell you yours," said the boy, affectionately, under his breath.

"What's that red rag hung out on the end of a stick, that's stuck in the window?" enquired Cilian, loftily, as she stood at the door, in order to look out at the hillside above her, to see whether Evan was still in sight.

"It's only a little flag as I set up, because it's the first day as mother seems herself and is out again," answered the boy, sheepishly, and going out of the room to avoid being questioned.

Choicy's face shone and her eyes filled, but she said nothing; the boy's love was very precious to her, and they understood each other without words.

The following evening, Barnard Morris came up to the cottage with Howell, after their work was done, and Cilian blushed red with vexation as he entered the door. She looked all the handsomer, if not the pleasanter, for the flashing of her great dark eyes and the glow on her brown cheek, as she grew more and more annoyed at everything the poor fellow said and did. Choicy sat sadly watching them, and trying from time to time to put in a healing word, but the lad was blind, and would not see the rocks he was running on; the girl grew angry, and the well-meant interference only made matters worse. Barnard agreed with everything which Cilian said; and when in her vexation she uttered

the most contradictory things she could think of, he always contrived to find some reason for being still of the same opinion with her. Even when she took refuge in entire silence, he insisted on appealing to her at every moment, and waiting on every word which fell from her lips. He tried to get near her when she made excuses to be moving about the room for the very purpose of getting further from him. He refused to understand her rudeness, or to see her dislike. She could have cried with vexation, and at last found something to do with the baby in the inner room, so as not to shake hands with him at parting, though he lingered about the door till they were all tired of him.

"You must not bring Barnard home at night any more, William," said Choicy to her husband as soon as they were alone.

"Why not?" answered he, surprised. He had as usual seen and heard nothing of what had been going on while he was brooding over the affairs of the impending strike, and the management of the committee, and supposing them all to be as full of the subject as himself.

Choicy half laughed. "What for is it any use, then, when she can't bear the sight of him, and he doats on the ground she treads on? they'll only get worse and worse, and farther and farther from being together. If he's ever to have a chance it won't be by his finding; he must just stay away for his own sake. And I won't have Cilian plagued while she's stopping with us. I wish the lad well enough, but it's after my own sister I must care, what is nearest and dearest to me," said Choicy, with very unwonted energy of assertion, as she put out the light, and lay down by his side.

During the course of the next morning, while she and her sister were sitting together, and supposed to be thinking of and discussing the baby, Cilian said suddenly—"I think I will go and see granny, up at Bodavon. I did hear she was not very well last Tuesday, from one who was that way and saw her. And I'd maybe best be out of the way from

hem I don't want to see, and them you do not want for to see me," and she laughed a little sadly. "Mr. Evan he did say he should be away from Plas Dhu for awhile, out visiting somewhere, and then after that we shall all be forgot, perhaps, if I am gone, and it shall be a deal better. I sometimes think I will go to service for a bit."

Choicy sighed. "I shall miss thee sorely, child. Yet if you do think it well for to go, it may be well; but you must not think of service neither—this is your home, Cilian, whenever and howsoever you shall want one, and where we do love you better than any one else in the world, however, you do know that very well. You should be the first of the family ever went out so, and you shall stay here till you has home of your own, whatever."

Choicy was come of an old family by her own mother, and was mildly proud of it. In Wales, the knowledge of genealogies is kept up unbroken in a way unheard of elsewhere; and there was a black-letter Bible, preserved with almost religious reverence, in her press, where a maid-of-honour of Elizabeth's time figured with distinction in the pedigree. The dignity of the race had, however, gone on diminishing for generations; they had sunk from landed proprietors to farmers, till the male line died out, ruined, and the daughter of the last link had derogated by marrying a labourer, the father of Choicy and Cilian. With all her aristocratic looks, however, Cilian had none of the ancient blood in her veins, but was the child of a second wife of far lower degree.

CHAPTER V.

BRYNFELYN, THE "YELLOW BANK."

It was the day after the strike had been announced, and before Evan's arrival at Bodavon had been heard of, when the two girls of the farm on the hill above Mrs. Randolph's, laughing, healthy, pretty, not hoydenish, but in tearing

spirits, had scrambled on to a couple of bare-backed ponies, without any species of saddle or bridle. They clung on by the knee to the horse's shoulder in some marvellous fashion, with as good seats and as innate riding propensities as any South American gauchos, and were careering at full speed down the rough green lanes. They had on neither hats, nor cloaks, nor outdoor gear of any kind; their merry voices rang in the cheerful, crisp, sunshiny, mountain air, when at a sharp turn round a rock, where the lane ended in the road, they came suddenly on a stranger—a rare sight in that lonely valley—and pulled up. It was a young man in a gig, and as he passed them, driving rapidly, he called out a laughing greeting in bad Welsh.

The girls coloured up like fire, and stood still for a moment in dismay, looking after him.

"I wonder who he can be?" said Essie (Iseult).

"I know!" answered Gwenny quickly. "It's Mr Harold up from Kefn Glas; I saw him one day when I was down there stopping with cousin Morgan. I should n't wonder if he's after the shooting up here, he's always shooting somewhere, they said, and he's the youngest. He'll be coming to see his great aunt at Bodavon, I'll be bound. There's none so good-looking as he is."

"He must think us just out of our wits, without so much as a handkercher on!" said Essie, half crying.

"I don't mind if he does," answered her bolder sister, recovering herself, and helped by the remembrance of the expression of the strange Mr. Harold's face, which was not without a certain laughing admiration.

"I shall just go back to granny," said Essie, turning her shaggy little steed up the hill again rather sadly.

"What's the odds how he thinks," cried her sister, impatiently.

"I do not like that any man should think us bold," went on Essie, plaintively.

"They are all at sixes and sevens down at Kefn Glas and Plas Dhu, they say; what with the strike coming on, and

Mr. Lancaster always quarrelling with his sons, and all the others not so very nice together. I wonder what Mr. Arnold will be doing up here !”

“ I should not like the quarrelling, not for all the money you have got, if that 's the way they go on.”

“ It shall not all be quarrelling though,” replied Gwenny loudly. “ And Mrs. Lancaster she did drive up the street the day I was there with cousin Morgan, and two horses that were prancing like mad in the carriage, not half broke they were, real fine horses, not like these stupid ponies, and a black all over black lace that must have cost pounds and pounds !—there 's beautiful it was ! for she stopped at our door about some meat that was not just so good, and it was when Morgan did tell me how fine the lace should be ! ”

Essie did not answer. The quality of Mrs. Lancaster's black did not interest her, but then she had not had the advantages of the opening into the great world in that splendid metropolis, Kefn Glas, which Gwenny had enjoyed a few months before in her visit to her cousin. It had given her a superiority in knowledge of things in general which she would have been more than human not to air occasionally, and which made her presume upon her sister a little from time to time.

The girls had by this time reached their home in the solitary old farmhouse at Brynfelyn, the “ yellow bank ” of uttercups; long, low and thatched, high up on the mountain side, but sheltered under a shoulder of rock and a ragged bunch of sycamores, the last skirmishers, as it were, of the abundant woods below. Everything within and about the place was enjoying the rare sunshine on that brilliant day. The view on all sides was magnificent, and glorious lights and shades were passing over the wide expanse. From that lofty eminence an intricate series of alleys, branching out of each other, could be traced for miles, each with a stream at the bottom, tumbling and racing among the rocks and trees, and falling into each other, till they united in a full-sized river far away. Here

listlessly over a gate, and Gelert by his side, who had by this time given up all the petticoats for Evan's congenial society. He had been watching vainly for Cilian all the morning, but she kept resolutely out of his way. He grew vexed and angry, and would have shown his wrath by going farther afield, after having exhausted the limited resources of the place, but that he did not like to move till he had seen his aunt and made sure it was peace. He took no notice of his brother's greeting except by shrugging his shoulders and taking the piece of grass out of his mouth. "It would n't signify so much," went on Harold, piteously, "if you had n't dragged me into the mess. Why, my father's just refused me five pounds! Five pounds, after all that you've been spending! I should like to know if that's fair, I, that have never come upon him for half, no, nor a quarter that you've been running into all this while!"

"Perhaps that's one reason why he has n't got it now to give," replied Evan, half laughing. He was clear sight enough for other folk, though not for his own affairs.

"Not got it? Why he's rolling in gold, but he's got so stingy lately, that's what it is. And I don't know where to turn for sixpence to bless myself with, and no end of things to pay! It's a sin and a shame!"

"What does my father say about me?" asked Evan, dolefully, too full of his own woes to attend to those of his brother.

"Say! Why he's quite mad with you, and says he'll be hanged before ever he pays a farthing more of your bills; you may go to jail for all he cares. And mother's crying her eyes out because she can't do anything with him about 'em. He's as obstinate as a bull-dog once he's got a notion between his teeth, and you ought to have known that. How you could go the pace like this I can't think! So silly, just now, too."

"The pot said to the kettle ---," answered Evan, rather savagely, "I like your talking to me about 'the pace.'"

"I shall just go and look at that mare of yours, I suppose you 'll be obliged to sell her, and I've always hankered after her ever since you bought her of Jones. If I can only get my father to buy her, I 'd swap Marygold with him, I 'm sick of the horse!"

"But you know he won't, he 's no money to spare, and I must have money down, and a good deal too, for Black Bess, she 's worth it. And my father 's much too sharp to take Marygold with a spavin and all!"

"It 's worth trying on, anyhow. I shall go and look at Bess again at any rate," said Harold, who would have gone on attempting to make a bargain in horseflesh if he had been on the high road to execution. "Come, Gelert," he called to the dog, who looked undecided for a moment, but followed him at last.

Evan turned into the house annoyed. He did not relish the notion of parting with his horse, which had thus been brought before him so curtly. The feeling of ruin came nearer to him than he had as yet at all realised it.

"I wish my aunt would make haste, I can't settle to anything till she comes," said he, irritably, to himself. "And what on earth has come over Cilian that she won't speak to me? And, I declare, there 's that Gelert gone off with the merry one! I 'm too dull even for the dog!"

Meantime Cilian had gone upstairs to break Harold's arrival to the old lady, who was sitting ruminating in her dressing gown, with her snuff-box in hand, out of which she was taking large pinches "to clear her mind," as she said.

"What! there 's another of 'em come?" cried she, angrily. "Cilian, do you go down and ask if Mr. Harold will be so kind as to say how soon the rest of the family will be here, and how long they mean to stop—that I may see and lay in coal, and candles, and tea, and sugar for the whole tale of 'em! Talk of strikes!" she shouted, hitting the toilet table vehemently, to the great detriment of her best cap, which awaited her there in state, "I know I

should strike if I was n't a poor, mean-spirited, wretched old woman, to stand their putting upon me in this way, after never coming near me for so long! Go down, I tell you, and say I won't see Mr. Harold! I 've had enough of 'em, and that he had better take his brother away with him, too, as soon as he can be off. I don't want any of 'em! What are you waiting for?" she cried, indignantly, as Cilian stood hesitatingly at the door.

"I don't think I can quite go for to say that, ma'am," said the girl at last, in a low voice. "The young gentlemen won't take it from me, will they, to forbid that they do stop at their own aunt's house."

"Well, if I must go myself, I must, that 's all. (Even my own maid to take their side,)" muttered Mrs. Randolph, who had by this time worked herself up into a violent passion. "What the deuce is come to the world, I wonder." A Pagan expletive or two seemed to relieve the old lady's mind occasionally.

Infirm as she was, she finished dressing herself, rejecting all help from Cilian with scorn, settled her wig and cap all awry, and refused all interference in redressing their balance. She was proceeding slowly down the slippery old black oak staircase, steadying herself with her cane as she went, when a door opened below, and the unwonted sounds of the piano began to well up the house. Evan had a curious knack of music in him, without having ever been regularly taught, and when he was vexed and out of sorts it seemed to come naturally as a relief from his annoyances. He had wandered into the drawing-room when his brother left him, had opened the old battered, worn-out piano, and was now playing scraps of old Welsh airs, "The Rising of the Lark," "All Through the Night" (degraded into "Poor Mary Anne" in the English version of the words), a whole stream of melody which he was modulating and harmonising in ways of his own. His fingers seemed to sing even on the wretched old keys as he touched them, and the old lady paused on the stairs, her

anger fast evaporating, while

"Scenes long past, of joy and pain
Came 'wildering o'er her aged brain."

In vain she tried to keep her wrath. She was quite unconscious of what was going on, even about her own respected head, when Cilian, following, took advantage of the opportunity to settle the errant cap and shawl, so as to avoid the ludicrous effect she was risking, instead of the proper tragic impression upon her nephews which she wished to produce. But it was neither in the mood she intended, nor with the greeting which she had proposed to herself, that she entered the room.

"Evan, play that again! How long it is since I've heard it!" said she, standing over him and beating time energetically on his shoulder with a heavy hand. "Play some more; I want some more. Where did you get that setting of 'Merch Meggan,' I wonder? Did you make it yourself?" And there were tears in her old eyes as she added, "your uncle, John Randolph, used to sing it to me fifty years ago, aye, and a good deal more. A very sweet voice he had, had John, when he was young! and he was a good man, too. Play it up again, I say, and then play the 'Lament of Rhyddlan' and the 'Bells of Aberdovey.' No, that 's not right—there was a little twirl at the end there, as he always sung it, and you should n't go down that last long note, but up is the right way!" and she emphasised her meaning with her closed fist in the air, as she subsided into a big chair by his side.

The musical instinct is unusually strong in the Welsh, and they are stirred by their old airs historically, as well as by the notes themselves. There is a whole treasure of national recollections and associations connected with the sounds to them, as is the case with certain speeches in Shakespeare, and an ode or two of Campbell's, in England, and some lines of Burns for the Scotch, which rouse them as with the sound of a trumpet.

Mrs. Randolph sat down by the piano, riveted and touched. "Ah! 'The Men of Harlech,' and 'Gweneth Gwen,' and 'With the Dawn!' I remember how we children used to go to the mill down in the glen, near to home, at Glen Coch, and the old miller and his wife always made so much of us little ones, and Matho' would sit and play those tunes on his flute, there outside the mill, for us to dance to; I've never heard any music in my life like old Matho's flute, and the drops of the great water-wheel plashing on behind, and the double daisies, and the handsome Phoebe, with her white teeth, who used to dance with us too, and give us the flowers and the new milk. It's strange how that music brings it all back to me again. Why, it must be, let me see, nearly eighty years ago."

The tender little idyl sounded strange, contrasted with the hard-featured, stern old speaker, and Evan looked up, surprised, from his wandering minstrelsy, at the unexpected result which he was producing, and then was silent again, and played on, moved as an artist is by the effect of his own performance upon his auditors. He had till then been straying on almost unconsciously, half improvising, as a sort of vague relief to the dim discomfort he was enduring. But if conscious of an audience at all, it must be a sympathetic one to draw forth the best that is in a man. We, the hearers, are often the authors of our own disappointments and the guilty parties, when the musician or the actor fails to give us that best which only our own intelligent co-operation of listening can enable him to produce.

Mrs. Randolph's whole attention was fixed on Evan. She turned away from Harold when he came in again from the stable, and scarcely took any notice of him or of his explanations that he had come to bring up his brother's goods. But injustice is the usual code of our behaviour to each other. With most people it is the accident of the mood, either physical or moral, in which they happen to be, which determines the treatment you receive from them, not in any way your own merits or demerits.

Of the two brothers, Evan was certainly the greater delinquent. He had been sent away by his father for his extravagance, and had invaded his aunt's sanctuary neither with her leave nor by her leave. Yet it was Harold, whose only crime had been enacting carrier to his brother's port-nanteau, whom she kept at arm's length, Harold at whom she made chilling little snorts. She scarcely spoke to him even during the early dinner, except to press him to eat too much, which her creed of hospitality made a quite indispensable part of the duties of a hostess, while she lavished her welcomes and her courtesies upon Evan, who was out of spirits and out of heart, and did not much respond to her. His brother's tidings of the state of affairs at home were not encouraging, and his position was becoming more and more unpleasant. If the horsedealer came down upon him for the money he owed, he had absolutely nothing wherewith to pay, and his father, in his present humour, might not object to see him summoned before a magistrate, and even, as Harold had hinted, sent to jail. All this was passing through his mind as he trifled carelessly and unconsciously with his aunt's early strawberries, while she watched him a little jealously at his want of appreciation of them.

"And what about the strike, I should like to know?" said Mrs. Randolph at last, rather austere—"Cilian has been dinning her side of it into me ever since she's been here, and all the reasons why the men should always have their wages raised when trade's good, and never have them come down again whatever happens."

"Heads I win, tails you lose," put in Harold, flippantly.

Mrs. Randolph looked daggers at him. "What have you got to say, Evan, I should like to know?"

"It's all in a nutshell as far as we're concerned. Iron's fallen and is falling more, and we can't go on paying as much for the coal to smelt it, and the wages of the men who work it, only to sell it at a loss. That's the long and short of the matter. How anyone but a delegate could

fancy it possible, I can't think. I wonder how they persuade the people to believe it, who know what prices are just as well as we do. There are the Horwoods have been working to stock these months past, paying wages, locking up capital in puddle bars, hoping to sell them when better times come round, and all to keep their men in work till the tide should turn, and they are struck against just the same. I hear that even they couldn't have gone on much longer at present prices."

"Yes, yes. I don't doubt the reduction was all right and necessary, or the Horwoods wouldn't risk making it as they have done; they 're good men and sharp ones, too. And I 've no doubt *your* father has been doing a right thing in as wrong a way as can be, as *he* always does. He 's the man to take hold of a knife by the blade if he can manage it, and to rub all folks' backs the wrongest way he can take!"

It was not quite the moment, or the right thing, to attack the absent father to his sons, and the old woman herself felt that she had gone too far; she was rather pleased when Evan stood up in his defence, and she did her nephew justice in her heart for it, though she said nothing.

"My father 's done the best he could in the matter, and no man can do more; it 's hard enough to be right, Heaven knows. He 's paid the higher wages to the men till the profits came down to next to nothing, and now he must stop work altogether, or lower the cost of it somehow—everybody can see that."

And then came a silence which lasted too long to be pleasant, till Mrs. Randolph began on a fresh topic for her own relief.

"I like those Horwood girls, their mother brought them over to see me last autumn. Why don't one of you two make up to them, they 're nice girls as any there are about—clever, good, and plenty of sense, very well brought up, I must say."

"I don't like what you call well brought up girls,

they 're a great deal too prim and stuck up for me," muttered Harold between his teeth.

"That 's because you 're an ignorant, unlicked, graceless cub, who dresses like a groom and looks like an idiot with his hands in his pockets," said Mrs. Randolph promptly.

She was often sorry when she had made her sharp hits; she knew that she had alienated her niece, and made the house too hot to be pleasant to her nephews, but she could not have restrained her bitter tongue to save her life, and at past eighty it is a little late to undertake one's own reformation.

"I saw two girls ten times prettier than your Horwoods, tearing down the lane at full gallop as I came up here," grumbled Harold, a little sullenly; but he was a good-natured young fellow, and bore no malice for the attack.

"It must have been those mad Llewelyn girls from Brynfelyn. They 're always scampering along up and down the hills," replied Mrs. Randolph rather glad to relax. "There 's no harm about them, but they 're just like wild things. Their father's as sensible, decent, intelligent a man as I know. I have him down to speak to me about one thing and another every now and then, and he brought one of them (she 's my godchild) with him this spring. She coloured up like a rose when I praised her riding—she inherited that from her grandmother, who was the best horsewoman anywhere about the country. The child had a very pretty colour and eyes. I liked her looks. She was n't a bit forward for all her tearing spirits. Only as to complexions now-a-days, they 're not to be talked about to what they were. Your mother had a face like a china rose and a lily before you all drove her to death as you have done, and wore the very life out of her. That little Gwenny's is just nothing to hers, as I remember it—eh, dear, how many years ago?"

"I think I shall go up to Brynfelyn and see about the partridges," interrupted Harold, anxious to avoid the moral reflections which seemed likely to hang on this record of

his mother's early charms. "There must be some famous shooting to be got in those barley fields under the hill in September; I remember the nests there of old when I was here as a boy, and I'm sure Llewelyn would let me go after the birds if you'd ask him, Aunt Randolph—he would not like to refuse you. I've got nothing to do now, and I want to get out of that confounded hole at Plas Dhu, which is dull as ditch water for any fun to be had there now."

The old lady glared at him for the cool liberty of the proposal.

"If you're going up the mountain, Harold, I'll just go with you, I want a walk," said Evan, rousing himself out of his black fit.

His was the artist nature, easily affected by pain and pleasure alike, susceptible to all impressions, seeing dark things very dark, and bright ones very brilliant.

Upon this intimation of her favourite's wishes, Mrs. Randolph changed her mind. "Well, if you *are* going, you can tell old Llewellyn that I shall feel gratified if he can see his way to letting you make fools of yourselves, wasting your time after those wretched birds that have never done you any harm, heaven knows! I've paid the rent of that bit of cover on the other side the valley this ever so long, which I took, I believe, most for the sake of you boys in the old days, and I've never had but an odd bird or so, or a miserable rabbit out of it, but they're just convenient for a present, and this year, I dare say, I shan't get any! I'd have given it up long ago when I saw how ill you'd all turned out, but I've got a lease, so I could n't help myself. So now be off with you both, I want to be quiet. I can't stand all this racket, I can tell you!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE OLD HILLSIDE FARM.

It was late in the afternoon when the two brothers reached the old farmhouse, perched on its lofty height. In its exposed situation almost every window was carefully turned towards shelter, and away from the magnificent view; either a shed, or the shoulder of the hill, being cunningly brought into use to shut out the great enemy—the wind—though with it all outside prospect. The door was open, and as they came near they could hear the merry voices of the girls, busy in feeding a lamb apiece, twins which had lost their mother, and were accordingly brought up in the house. Gwenny held an old teapot, with a bit of wash-leather round the spout, to the mouth of one; and Essie, with her arms round the neck of the rival claimant, was dragging it back as it butted at Gwenny with all its might, asserting its rights to immediate supper. Unlike the ideal lamb, the real one is a very obstinate and headstrong little beast.

The girls started, with their ever-ready blushes, at the rare sight of strangers, but old Gwenny rose out of her big black armchair, and received them with dignified good breeding and gracious courtesy. Her granddaughters were dressed after the ugly fashion that had come from Kefn Glas, and the old lady looked much more picturesque in her striped black and white woollen petticoat and apron, her starched linen handkerchief pinned behind and looped over her breast, and a black silk quilted hood over her head, which showed off the delicate complexion of her small face, good teeth, and pretty blue eyes, even at her age. She

looked like a picture as she made her neighbour, Mrs. Randolph's, nephews welcome, in a voice as refined as her looks.

The beautiful manners of the past will soon be extinct. It seems as if we could hardly grow them amidst the hurry, the struggle for existence, the zeal for getting on and up, of the present day; a certain repose of mind is necessary for perfect behaviour. Security of position is also a great help, which may be as much felt in a lower as an upper class, but any aping of superior class, or striving after a higher grade of society, is fatal to them. The noblesse of the *ancien régime* of France and Austria had a stately flavour of exquisite courtesy which possessed a great charm; the close corporation to which they belonged rendering it impossible that any one could tread on their heels or entrench on their prerogatives; the *sangre azur*, the blue blood, was not to be improvised, and they were never afraid of unbending, for no one of lower rank could imagine any equality possible between themselves and the Duc de la Rochefoucauld or the Prince Schwarzenberg. But this feeling is often possessed as completely by the peasant or small farmer as by the greatest nobles in the land, or at least was in past times, and some of the best manners in England are still to be found among the inmates of old English cottages. A certain dignity and courtesy combined, a true self-respect, yet complete forgetfulness of self in consideration for the feelings and comforts of others, together with the tact and fine perception to put their good intentions into practice, for blundering goodwill alone cannot suffice to form the essence of true courtesy.

" For manners are not idle, but the fruit
Of loyal nature and of noble mind."

Old Gwenny Brynfelyn's complete self-possession and dignified care for her guests would have graced a princess. Her son was plain, and sensible, and straightforward, but he was quite without his mother's instinct, and the two pretty

girls, self-conscious, half shy, half curious, were very far below their grandmother's standard.

Harold, however, saw no deficiencies in them, and began flirting vigorously with both at once, on the very threshold of the house. He was awkward with women in general, but here were girls who could ride as well as or better than he did, and who appeared full of knowledge on the all-important subject of horses and dogs, and he "got on" with them directly; while Evan, who had inherited something of the old habit of manners from his mother, was left to do all the courtesies of the occasion to the old lady. She inquired affectionately after Mrs. Randolph, spoke tenderly of Mrs. Lancaster, passed lightly over his father, asked no questions, ignored all that she thought could pain him, handled even the hot question of the strike with the tact of real feeling, and then turned to the blowsy maid, who had stopped the twirling of a great spinning-wheel, to gaze with her mouth open at the strangers.

"Go and tell master," said she, in Welsh, pointing through a small irregular window, which had been allowed to exist for its convenience in overlooking the farm. "He is here down among the beans." Her quick eye had detected him before Evan, who was looking over her shoulder at the grand panorama of valleys and hills spread out before them, could find him out.

"Why what a sweep of country it is. I think this must be 'the exceeding high mountain,' and that we are looking down on all the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them."

"But I hope you is not think it is the devil that is showing you them," answered Gwenny, laughing, as she ordered out the mead and the new bread, and the large flat oatmeal cakes, and the 'typpen ó wien,' which the girls spread on the little round oak table, and began the pressing to eat, a troublesome tax, which must be yielded to under pain of great offence to the entertainers.

"What beautiful butter," said Evan, turning at a

chance shot to Essie, who blushed deeply with the consciousness of skill and of pride at this public recognition of it in her handiwork.

"It 's Essie manages the dairy, and she were called Iseult after your mother, Mr. Evan, what she used to be so much down here, stopping with your great aunt, in the old days. And she said, did Mrs. Randolph, she 'd be the child's godmother, and then she called her for her niece, she did, though Mrs. Lancaster she hardly knew of it perhaps, I am thinking, so little as she 's been here lately."

"I 'm sure my mother ought to be much pleased with her namesake," said Evan, complimentarily, as in duty bound by the occasion.

"Llewelyn," cried Harold, as the old man came in at that moment, "we 're come with a message from my aunt about the partridges; she thought you 'd let us have the shooting this September—her bit is so small it isn't worth taking out a gun to."

"If Mrs. Brynfelyn approves," added Evan, turning to the ancient head of the household, who evidently did not quite relish being thus left out of the request for game to be shot on her own land.

"You shall be welcome to what we has got, in mother's name and mine too, and there 's some trout in the stream down there by Tydden Issa, what you may see on the hill yonder, where mother's just come back from walking, and that do be so much as two miles to this house, and she past her eighty-eight on Monday," replied Llewelyn.

"You were a wonderful horsewoman, Gwenny, in your time, aunt Randolph says."

"Could back a horse was not a woman in the country could ride, there after she were seventy!" observed her son with pride.

"What pretty china!" said Evan, going to look at the 'corner cupboard' as a diversion to prevent as many cakes, cream, and honey being put down his throat as would have satisfied half a dozen hungry men. The treasures of the

family were displayed round a centre formed by six silver spoons, tied in a fan, and set out conspicuously as an evidence of property and respectability, far too precious to be made use of in common life. "I declare that teapot is better than the one at Plas Dhu which my mother makes such a fuss about!" said he to Essie, who, as his mother's same-child, came forward to do the honours of the china.

"They do come to us from my great grandmother," said Jewelyn, translating for his mother, "and we do be here for two hundred years and more, from father to son, in this Brynsfelyn, which is our own; it is not very large to be sure, but we was all born here, and the most of us have died here too."

Gweny had relapsed into her beloved Welsh, which sounds soft and musical in so sweet a voice as hers. Her knowledge of English was not very large, and she did not launch out into such historical disquisitions in a foreign tongue. She knew her own depth and did not go beyond it.

Meantime Harold was making great progress with the girls, and had managed to become initiated into the birth, parentage, and education of all the pets about the place. Gweny "vach" (the little, to distinguish her from her grandmother) had shown him the brood of yellow ducklings hatched in flannel by the fire "because their mother was a bad sitter," one of which the girl was carrying about in her bosom; and the seventeen little new pigs; the quill for the mops' mess of milk; the calves, and the dogs. The girls were much alike at first sight, but the younger, Gweny, was smaller, and rounder, and rosier, and talked more. Essie's grey eyes, with their long lashes, had more capability in them, and she was taller and slenderer than her sister.

"And where are those two ponies that were running away with you this morning when I passed up to Bodavon?" enquired Harold, laughing.

"They weren't running away!" cried Gweny the little, indignantly.

"Well, then, which you were running away with? Do you always ride full gallop down hill, and without a saddle, I wonder? Why, Miss Fairfax couldn't do it! and she 's out and out the best horsewoman we have in the — hunt!"

Old Gwenny heard and by no means approved—"You shall not spoil our little girls like that, Mr. Harold, if you please," she said, in a very decided tone in spite of its gentleness.

"Father did bring the ponies from the Fair o' Wyn last autumn," observed young Gwenny complacently—"there 's hundreds and thousands of them, he says, there up on the top of the high hill—lots o' horses, and droves o' ponies, broke and unbroke—they will come there out o' all the country round!"

"I mean to go to the Fair next year; there 's many a nag worth something to be picked up there, I know, for one who understands horseflesh," said Harold importantly.

"They say you can see them ever so far off on the hill, tearin', and kickin', and fightin', and bitin'; and hear 'em, too, hollering like mad," added the girl, laughing—"it must be such a fun! With coats an inch thick, as shaggy as bears, and as wild as hawks, driven in from ever such a way off, father says."

"Why, Gwenny Brynfelyn, I do believe you knit as unconsciously as you breathe!" said Evan, watching the busy little old hands which moved almost automatically; "you knit when you walk and when you sit, when you talk and when you are silent—do you go on after you are asleep, I wonder?"

"I like the whirr of the spinning wheel, it 's almost like music; show me how you do it," said Harold to Essie, who began deftly spinning the thread and winding it round the spindle. She looked very pretty as her lithe, active little person went walking backwards and forwards after the great whirling wheel—"It 's very nice work and so easy, I 'm sure I could do it quite as well as you do."

“ You 'd better try for yourself and see,” replied Essie demurely, putting the little wisp of wool into his hand, and laughing merrily at his ineffectual attempts to join the thread, or spin the thread, or wind the thread.

“ It 's like choosing a horse, not so easy as it looks, not by no means,” observed Llewelyn, with his grave smile.

“ We must be going back to my aunt's,” said Evan at last, with something like a sigh. It was pleasant to forget all about money troubles, and horse dealers, and his father's wrath, up in the quiet atmosphere of the little mountain farm. “ You 've got to drive back to Plas Dhu to-night, too, remember,” he added, turning to his brother.

“ Plenty of time for that, there 's a young moon, and I 'd back Marygold to find her way home in a night as dark as pitch. There isn't another like her in the country,” said Harold, with his love of brag, forgetful of spavins, and of all he had said against his steed in the morning.

“ There do be a shorter way to Madam Randolph's, across the field and under the crag. I will take you,” said old Llewelyn.

“ You shall find two or three partridges' nests in that hay-field you pass, that shall be mown to-morrow,” whispered little Gwenny, to whom Harold had been confiding his good intentions concerning the birds when slaughtering time should arrive.

“ What 's the use of your telling me that, unless you come with us and show us the nests,” answered he in the same tone.

“ Granny won't like it,” whispered she again.

“ Gwenny, you must let the girls come down and shew us where the broods lie, and the nests, so that Llewelyn may have the eggs put under a hen to-morrow, if they 're not hatched yet. We 'll take care and bring you a brace or two of birds in September,” pressed Harold, authoritatively. The old lady yielded unwillingly, but he carried the day.

They all five set off together down the hill, as the summer twilight began to settle on the lower valleys, and

gradually crept up the hillsides, which still shewed bright in the level rays of the clear yellow sunset light. Their own long shadows fell before them, gigantic, far ahead; faint sweet smells seemed to come out of the very ground at their feet, as they trod on the wild thyme growing in patches on the bare rock, and from the mountain flowers in the mowing hay round the doomed homes of the partridges, while the apricot scent of the golden gorse was wafted down from the common land at the summit of the hill. Soon they reached the lower regions where the great beech and oak overarched the green lanes near old Mrs. Randolph's house, the tall hawthorns in full blossom glimmered white in the gloaming, and the cry of the owls, echoed back from the opposite hill, sounded long and weird.

"Now just see if I don't bring the birds all round you," said Harold, beginning to hoot most successfully through his closed hands. Presently, a mysterious whisking of wings could be dimly seen in the leafy shadows, which came nearer and nearer, and passed close to their heads.

"There's a fright I had!" cried Essie, pressing against her sister. "It do be like a ghost, I'm sure, more than owls."

Meantime, Llewelyn, striding down the hill a good way ahead with Evan, had forgotten to turn back, as he discussed the strike, which he felt was drawing unpleasantly near himself.

"And what we must come to in farming, if the men is to be the judges of what profit we can live on, for to fix their own wages their own selves, I'm sure I can't say!"

"A delegate will kindly, perhaps, come and help you to settle what to give to your dairymaid," answered Evan, rather cynically.

"A farmer can but just make both ends meet as it is. I did hear a man from Manchester say the other day that nobody there would even look at such interest as we do get, and it is only because we do love the land and the fresh air,

and the cattle, and the old places, better than the so very much money, that we do go on as we do."

"It is a nice old place yours to live in, as ever I saw about, Llewelyn."

"But I 'm not so sure you 'd say so when the snow is up to your waist in winter, and a wind enow to blow the nose off your face," laughed the old man. "You 'd want to be down among the furnaces again, I 'm thinking. There! how I do miss the glare o' them at night. It did seem cheerful to see the red light come and go! I hope the men shall think better of it; I hear they say it 's the men's wages as makes the masters' capital, and that Thorne, the manager, makes answer (he is a sharp one!), and so it 's the masters' money as makes the men's wages, or they could n't get none—so it 's both sides depends on each other, I say. Come, girls, we must be getting home."

He was far too intent on his argument to think of watching his pretty daughters flirting with Harold, or to hear his protestations at parting, that he should very soon return to Bodavon, or his declarations that, when next either of them should return to Kefn Glas, he was sure his mother would be delighted to see them.

"You are very foolish little girls, both of you," said old Gwenny when they told her of this brilliant invitation. "Mrs. Lancaster would not be glad one bit, you may be quite sure of that."

Meanwhile, at the door of Bodavon, stood Mrs. Randolph and Evan, speeding the parting guest, as Harold mounted his gig and prepared to start in the twilight.

"You may say to your mother that Evan is to stay with me as long as he isn't allowed to go to his own home. You can tell your father so, with my compliments," shouted Mrs. Randolph, as he drove away. She had begun to take up Evan's cause in opposition to Mr. Lancaster, and was not sorry to send a defiant message to her enemy; but it was almost in a pleading tone that she turned to Evan him-

self—"You can make yourself comfortable for a while here, my boy, can't you?" said she.

As she passed into the house again, under the wreaths of ivy and travellers' joy, the peevish mood, however, returned.

"It's more than time to go to bed. I wonder whatever is become of that Cilian, that she don't fetch me! I'm just done up!"

Cilian came at the call, but stood sternly by in silence. Evan turned his back upon her, and began whipping the nearest bushes with his stick, to show both his perfect indifference and his annoyance at her systematic avoidance of his company.

"Just you leave my lilacs alone," said his aunt, savagely, "what harm have the poor things done you? but you're as cross as the rest of us! There's Cilian quite out of sorts, too, I can see that; but you're as bad-humoured as I am, and that's a good deal to say," she added, half laughing at her own ill-temper.

Poor Cilian had passed a melancholy day; she had conscientiously kept out of Evan's way, and had stayed in his aunt's room all the morning, until his brother's arrival had made a diversion in affairs. She was jealous of his long afternoon spent with the pretty girls up the hill, yet would not have had him loitering about Bodavon the whole day. She was in a painful tumult of contradictory feelings and desires. Mrs. Randolph in general treated her more like a friend than a servant. She usually spent the day in her mistress's company. But now the old lady was too full of the concerns of her nephews, too much pleased to have the opportunity of being angry, and of venting her long pent up spleen upon them, and, at the bottom of her heart, too much delighted to have the sons of her beloved niece back again under any pretence whatever, to care for anyone or anything beyond the pale of their interests.

Cilian went upstairs to her own room, when she had finished her usual evening service for the old lady, and

cried bitterly. She believed honestly that she did not want Evan to talk to her, or to seek her company, yet she was miserable at his not doing so, as she thought, any longer. She was torn in pieces by two different halves of her mind, and altogether puzzled and distressed by her own tumultuous sensations.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE STRIKE AT KEFN GLAS.

THE first week of a strike is generally very full of interest and excitement; the novelty of doing nothing is not unpleasant for a few weeks to busy men. But hope gradually becomes a very sickly food to live on in the absence of most other sustenance. The fall from five or six and twenty shillings a week to the pittance which the most liberal allowance which can be made by the Trades' Unions amounts to, seems, to men with families, a melancholy change.

The single men and the strangers, who can move more easily elsewhere, and have only themselves to care for, are indeed generally, as is natural, the main supporters of strikes. In the extraordinary increase of coal pits and iron works in Wales great numbers of men have been collected haphazard from all parts of the country, who care less about any further change of their abiding place than those born on the place. In the north the mass of the workers long to the county, are as a rule on better terms with their masters, and are generally more stationary at their

As the days went slowly on the prospects at Kefn Glas grew more and more cheerless. Groups of lounging men to be seen sitting or standing about with their hands

any great subject. In weighing evidence, or deciding on any fresh course of action, they must follow after the more adventurous and excitable of their companions; and if to follow, in some sense, must always be the lot of the majority, is it certain that the interests of the new leaders are identical with that of the men? Even the most honest delegates, however, must feel themselves much more important persons in time of strike; the manipulation of the funds is theirs, and their pay is certain whoever else starves. Strange revelations came out before the Royal Commission as to the pay of a committee man, and his duties, of which supping ale formed a great part. A master's interests could hardly be so antagonistic to his men's as that of such chiefs as these must often be.

There have always been many and excellent exceptions. William Howell was as honest a man as breathed. He was an enthusiast, earnest, and one-sided, with a passionate desire for justice, as he understood it, an ardent longing for the right; but it was, unconsciously, justice for his own class alone—aggrandisement for his own mates. All other interests, individual and social, patriotic or cosmopolitan, counted for next to nothing in his eyes. How could it be otherwise? It requires considerable intellectual power of conception of the circumstances of other men, and intense sympathy, to realise interests beyond one's own sphere. With all his goodwill he had neither time nor opportunity to learn to see beyond his own narrow experience of life.

He was scrupulously conscientious in his committee work, but he found that others were by no means so single hearted; there was a great deal of supping ale. And there can be no more painful trial to a man, fanatical for an idea, than to see it dragged through the mire by men less pure and earnest than himself, and yet to feel powerless to prevent the desecration. His mission, and it was one most truly to him, possessed his whole soul; the good or ill news from the central board, the fluctuations of the struggle, seemed to haunt him—he talked of them in his sleep. He

was a very tender-hearted man, but he refused to see the misery about him. "It will soon be over," he repeated to one and another, "and then you 'll all be better off far for what you are going through now. Only wait and see."

This power of enduring to see individual suffering for the advantage of a cause, whether right or wrong, to cut off not only one's own hand, and put out one's own eye for an ideal, but the hands and eyes of others, however dearly loved, is one which all leaders of men must possess. Howell shared it with Thorne, the manager, different as the men and their objects might be, and shocked as either would have been at any comparison with the other.

To add to the ever-growing distress, fever broke out at Kefn Glas, brought on in many cases by the privations which the people were voluntarily undergoing. Choicy was always a "good Samaritan," as her husband called her, and in spite of her young baby, she was constantly in and out among the sick.

At the foot of the flight of steps which led up to Howell's house, was an old thatched cottage, overshadowed with tall alder trees, and so deep in the hollow as to be almost sunless. It stood close to the stream, which dashed up above the level of the floor in the floods of any heavy rain, and was built of boulders out of its bed. Nothing could be more picturesque than the green mosses and house leek, which made the roof like a garden, or more damp than its single living room. Rosannah, the "tip girl," who had married, and lately given up her work, had come to live there. The pair were thriftless and penniless. She knew next to nothing of house work; her husband drank, and was a bad workman; they had had nothing to start with, and were among the first to feel the pinch of the strike. The poor woman had just been confined, and though Choicy had given what help she could, their own means were beginning to run short, and she could do but little.

One day Howell reached home as absorbed as usual, and was beginning to explain to his wife how "they say

hat up in the North there 's a subscription making for the Union funds, and that £700 is to be sent down to us next week, which will last ever so long— isn't it handsome? " When he was startled at his wife's tone as, without evidently hearing what he said, she looked up into his face, and began earnestly—

" William, hearken a bit, it 's about Rosannah Jones, she is most uncommon bad since the baby was born, and the doctor did say to-day as it was the typhus, and she will die if she be left with only that poor creature Job to care for her. I must not be coming to and fro from there to here, or it might be Ivor and the baby would take the fever. But Cousin Susan will take them in, she says, till all 's over one day or t' other, and I could be doing for you all the same, Willy, it isn't so bad for grown folk, and you out all day. You 'll let me go? There 's a many would take my children—that is well, but they can't risk their own by going to Rosannah, nor they can't have her baby into the house, it may have caught the fever from its mother already." In the simplicity of her heroism it did not occur to her that the risk was as great for her as for any one else, but Howell felt keenly.

" And if you should catch the fever your own self? " cried he, in great agitation.

" God will provide," said Choicy, quietly; " He sends it, whether 'tis life or death. Somebody must nurse her, and there 's no one but me to do it."

He was silent, while his wife made up her bundle, then when he saw her really going, he helped her to carry some food and fuel from their scanty store.

" Why there 's scarce nothing left in the house! " said he, looking in, and he fetched the rocking chair for her to sit in.

But Choicy stopped him at the door. " Why should you come in, Willy? and you the breadwinner. For the children's sake," she added, tearfully.

He turned away with a gulp in his throat. He did not

check her in her good deed ; but his silent sacrifice was as great as her own.

The cottage had been gradually stripped of almost everything it ever contained, and looked forlorn beyond description as she entered. She made up a little fire in the empty grate, and carried the gruel she had brought with her to the bed, which was only boxed off from the single room ; but Rosannah was too ill to swallow it.

The husband slunk off as she came in. " I will be back before long," said the poor creature, " I must have a mouthful of air." He might have added a mouthful of something stronger.

The woman lay tossing in the paroxysms of fever, with her parched lips and dry hands, moaning and muttering, unconscious of everything but her own sufferings, while the contrast between the size and strength of the great limbs, and their present utter helplessness, was strangely pathetic. Her babe lay beside her, having worn itself out with crying for the food and help which there was none to give. The poor are generous beyond measure in their care of each other, but women who would gladly have sacrificed nights of sleep, and given days of nursing, did not dare to carry the fever among their own children, and the waning light shone in at the narrow opening upon utter desolation.

There was little that even Choicy could do but to soothe the poor sufferer, and moisten her mouth from time to time, yet the baby might still be saved. She took it in her arms, and began to suckle it from her own breast, regardless of the risk to herself, and at first chiefly with the desire to keep it from troubling its mother, who, even in her delirium, seemed conscious of the dismal little wail which arose from time to time, and to be instinctively driven into a worse misery of restlessness by the sorrowful sound. The night wore on, Choicy walking up and down the scanty limits of the room, rocking the babe in her arms, and praying silently " for her that is not able to speak for herself, Lord," repeated she to herself.

Towards morning, as the cold light of the dawn began to shine into the room, the flush died out of the poor drawn face, but the life was departing with it. Recollection seemed to return for a moment to the dying woman. She woke up even in the very shadow of death, and turned towards the place where Choicy was sitting with the child on her lap. The dying eyes were startling in their mute entreaty, as she glanced from one to the other.

And Choicy answered the appeal of the painful eyes—"Yes, I will take it and do for it, so help me God," she said, gently, as she stooped over the bed. "You shall not need to fear for it," and she gathered the little atom to her breast in her quiet, still way, which would have given confidence even to one worse beset than poor Rosannah.

There was just time for the shadow of a smile, which seemed to flit round the mouth as the eyes closed for ever.

In the brief agony, poor Job had hardly yet roused himself, and now came up half blinded with sleep and helplessness.

"Whatever shall I do with the little one," said he, "and her dead and gone? The neighbours will be 'fraid of it for the fever, as if it were a live coal I'd dropped among them, and I can't not bring up a babby myself, how can I?"

"I will take it," answered Choicy, gently; "I promised its mother." And her sacrifice was as little wondered at, and taken as simply by others as by herself.

Job scarcely even thanked her. It was quite natural, he thought.

It is considered a difficult and anxious charge among the upper classes to adopt a child, but among the poor it is anything but uncommon to find a little stray as tenderly cared for as the rest of the family by working men and women, out of whose hard-won earnings its keep and clothing comes ungrudgingly year after year, with a simple unquestioning generosity, of which virtue they are quite unconscious.

CHAPTER IX.

A LAST APPEAL.

WEEK after week the strike dragged its tedious length along, and there seemed no signs whatever of yielding on either side. Barnard Morris had become more and more unsettled and moody; although he still went up occasionally to the cottage on the hill, he no longer listened submissively to Howell's long harangues, or showed the same interest in the affairs of the Union. Somewhat unreasonably also (only reason had not much to do with his present state of mind) he had never quite forgiven Choicy for Cilian's rejection of him, and insisted on thinking that if he had only had fair play, he should have got on better in his suit. One day, in spite of her sister's remonstrances, he set forth from Bodavon to try his fate again with the girl.

It was a hot evening in July, and as he came up the valley, long, narrow, and twisting, which led from Kesh Glas, there seemed to be hardly any one in the few scattered houses which were to be seen after leaving the black settlement below. All the world was out helping in the hay, which was being cut and carried hurriedly, after a long time of the doubtful weather common in the hills. The rough, rocky outline of the steep mountain sides stood out bare against the sky, clad only with heath and fern in the crevices, but below this the upland lawns were busy with the pleasant life which once a year animated their silent slopes. In the beautiful fields which ran in and out of the bits of copse and between the larger, wilder stretches of ancient forest, with great twisted old oak and full-headed sycamore, swathes of scented grass were falling before the scythes of the mowers. Lines of women in their black hats of different degrees of altitude, over a full quilted cap, with

ere and there an old ugly "chimney pot," which was even
n becoming rare, were following with their rakes, turning
ver the cocks of hay, full of the mountain flowers, falling
their prime with no one to regret them. At the foot of
ch steep meadow carts and waggons, with their horses
velling in the feast of fresh food, stood about in pic-
resque confusion ; the pleasant sound of the sharpening of
e scythes (which we are fast losing for the ugly jar and
ang of the mowing machine), and of the cheerful voices,
as echoed back from one hillside to the other, with often a
ng melodious call, as clear as a bell, by which a few words
an be heard at a great distance in the hill country.

But Barnard did not stop for any such sights or sounds.
He pressed on ; and, hot and dusty, and footsore with his
ong walk, reached the house at Bodavon. There was
obody to be seen about, the maids were in Mrs. Randolph's
ay, helping like the rest of the community, and all was
ilent within and without the place.

Evan was away that day, attempting some arrangement
with his creditors, and carrying with him a peace-offering of
fty pounds which his aunt had given him. She could ill-
fford such a sum ; its loss would hamper her in a variety of
rays, and entail the giving up of many little luxuries which
t above eighty were hard for her to lose. Mrs. Lancaster
ent up all the help she could towards the additional
xpenses caused to the little household by its fresh inmate ;
out, in her present circumstances, this could be but little.
and Evan felt more ashamed of his extravagance than he
ad ever done before as he took the old lady's money. He
rowed within himself to restore it as soon as he received any
rom his mother. "And when the strike's over and all's
ight again, she'll be sure to send me some," he comforted
himself by saying to his conscience as an excuse for accept-
ng such a sacrifice. Like many other people he often paid
his debts with such good intentions for the future, and
ound the weight of uncomfortable gratitude much lightened
by this prospective rectitude. It is always much pleasanter

to say "lend me" than "give me"—you comfort yourself by the momentary nature of your obligation, and then forget it till a more convenient season, which with such people does not soon arrive.

Barnard, finding no one to speak to, made his way round the end of the house into the drying ground leading into a lonely orchard, which was full of weird old apple trees hung with long grey moss; and as he could still not see a single soul about, he went on into the garden, which lay on the side of the hill in terraces. The house was built almost in a hole, which our ancestors seem generally to have preferred, with a great love of shelter and warmth, when fuel was scarce, and apparently with none of our dread of damp before their healthy eyes and noses.

The whole place was now gay with large flowering shrubs. The ground was strewn with white petals of the guelder roses; long streamers of laburnum and bunches of lilac mingled with the tall trees, and groups of red lychnis and blue larkspur filled the rough borders. To his great satisfaction he saw Cilian standing apart, under the shadow of a large elm, watching Mrs. Randolph from a distance. The old lady was very jealous of her independence, and was taking a walk, that is crawling painfully with her stick along the yew tree terrace, an operation in which she did not choose to be helped by any one but the great dog, Gelert, who came to the garden door at the right moment, and walked quietly close to her side, instead of rushing wildly into every hole and corner of the bushes after imaginary rabbits, and never uttering a sound, instead of barking loudly according to his wont. He suited his steps to his mistress's with a touching and tender sagacity, moving as slowly and gently as if he had been her nurse, evidently regarding her as under his charge, companioning her intelligently and sympathisingly as long as she wanted him, and never leaving what he considered his duty, till he had taken her safely back to the house.

All this was going forward under the shelter of the tall

yew hedge, when Barnard, indifferent to everything but Cilian, and seeing nothing but her, hurried up to her side.

"You see I 'm come to see you after all, Cilian—I can't keep away," said her poor swain.

She turned on him in her coldest and most repellant one. "I 'm sure I don't know why you is come! I haven't made you so welcome down at Kefn Glas that you hould follow me up here to Bodavon to worry me!" cried he, wrathfully.

"I thought you might have given an old friend a better welcome than that, Cilian," said Barnard, in a bitter tone.

"If you was content to be an old friend," retorted she, quickly.

"I 'll be content with what you give me," answered he, adly, "and if I can't get more, I 'll take less."

"It 's best to speak out, Barnard," said she. "What good is it wasting your time going after me like this? I know my own mind, and I know as it is not the least morsel of good." Then, with a degree of feeling which he had never heard in her voice before, and which was born of her sentiment for another man than the one standing before her, she went on, earnestly, "Don't trouble after me any longer, Barnard, I 'm not worth it; I can't change my own heart, you should have it if I could; but it 's no good your trying, nothing can ever alter what I feel. Go home, go, if you care for me, and think no more about it. You 'll find plenty more better nor me in the world!"

"There 's no one will ever be better to me, and I shan't give over trying as long as you 're single, Cilian, and loving you as long as I 'm alive. Who knows but you may change your mind yet!" cried he, eagerly, misled by the emotion in her manner, sprung, if he had only known its cause, from what would have half broken his heart.

She shook her head vehemently, but did not speak, and then left him to rejoin Mrs. Randolph, who had now reached the end of her strength, and was thankful for help.

"Who 's that young man you were talking to, and what

is he come in here for, in the name of wonder ? " gasped she, taking Cilian's arm, breathlessly, as she prepared to go in.

" It 's an old friend from Kefn Glas," said the girl, with rather quivering lips.

" He 's a young man if he 's an old friend, anyhow. Why didn't you tell me before? I might perhaps have asked him to take something after that long hot walk. Hey! what! he 's a little bit more than an old friend, is he, eh ? " said she, sharply, detecting the emotion in Cilian's face, as she looked hard into it when the girl paused in her reply.

" And she won't so much as turn to look after me, nor bid me good-bye," groaned the poor fellow, as he left the garden of Eden dolefully behind him, gazing back at her to the last with his head over his shoulder.

" He 's a likely looking young fellow ; why won't you have him, Cilian ? How long has he been after you ? " said Mrs. Randolph, stopping short at the door to watch his retreating figure. She liked a little bit of dramatic excitement in the enforced quiet of her lonely life, and a love passage still stirred a tender fibre in her old heart.

" You 'd be better off with a comfortable home of your own, Cilian (though you 're well enough off here, I can't but say that), and a husband 's not a bad thing, if you know how to manage him," said she, consideringly. " What did you send him about his business for in that head-over-heels sort of way, and not wait for to talk it all over with me a bit? Shan't I call him back again, just for to see whether we can't somehow set it all square again betwixt you? Hey ? "

" You musn't, indeed you musn't, missis! " cried poor Cilian, in great agitation. " You 'd only make it worse, not better, for him, poor fellow, and there 's no cause for that. God knows ! "

" Well, to be sure, ' girls are kittle cattle to shoe,' as my old father used to say! Just brim full of whimsies

which nobody in their senses can make head or tail of! They 'll wring an honest man's heart as if it were of no more account than a linen shirt, and then, forsooth, be as tender as dew in the morning about hurting him, and making it worse! I wonder whether I was as bad as the rest of you about such matters when I was a girl myself—which was some time ago," said Mrs. Randolph, taking a pinch of snuff, and half laughing at the remembrance of certain passages in her own life when John had certainly come off rather hardly. "And now let 's go in, I 'm as tired as if I 'd been made love to myself all the afternoon! And do you just think of what I 've said to you, not that you should marry yet awhile, God knows, but when you 're older and wiser, and young what 's-his-name has made his way, and all then in time, all in good time. It 's sense it is, and it 's Scripture that you should come together with a good man, and he is a good one, eh, child?"

"Yes," said Cilian faintly, "I know he is, but that isn't enough to marry a man for."

"We 'll talk of it again, I 'm dead beat," panted Mrs. Randolph, going in laboriously.

Later in the evening the great dark masses of the trees in the full foliage of summer began to stand out colourless against the glowing heavens; one little star after another came out trembling through the dewy skies; presently the bright thin crescent of an infant moon appeared above the hill, when Cilian escaping from the close house after the old lady had retired, looked out at the open door. Everything was silent; the haymakers had all gone home, the birds and beasts were all at rest in thickets, among the leaves, in mossy nooks, in the hedges, on the hillsides—there was an occasional whisper of sound which made the stillness seem even greater, as if the world was holding its breath. She listened intently till she could hear in the dead silence the short sharp tread of a horse on the hard road, far away up the valley. It grew more and more distinct, till it stopped at the gate. She heard Evan's voice thanking the acquaint-

ance who had helped him thus far on his road, and wishing him good-night. Then came the swing of the wicket, and his eager, quick step up among the laurels of the approach, in the darkening night, as he came nearer and nearer to the house and the porch where she was standing.

CHAPTER X.

HIVING A REFRACTORY SWARM.

RATHER to his aunt's surprise, Evan stayed on and on, very contentedly, at Bodavon; besides which, Harold, having found himself very uncomfortable at home, where there was neither money nor amusement to be had, and his father's temper had become well nigh intolerable, discovered that his brotherly affection, and his care for the partridges, required his continued presence there. His supplies having been cut off in the general straitening of the family fortunes, he found he did not obtain credit as readily as formerly. It was therefore convenient to get his amusement gratis, and make use of the cheaper pleasures now that the more expensive ones were beyond his reach.

Mrs. Randolph consented at first somewhat ungraciously to his visits, but she was amused and interested by the change in her life. She opened her doors and her heart gradually to "the boys," as she persisted in calling her nephews, relaxed all her most cherished rules and habits in Evan's favour, and allowed even Harold to come in and out very much as he pleased during the rest of the summer and autumn.

It was more difficult to establish a footing at Brynfelyn. Llewellyn and his old mother fought rather shy of them both, but Mrs. Randolph was a much respected neighbour,

and it was difficult to keep her nephews away from the chances of fish, flesh, and fowl in the fields and brooks which adjoined her own.

There were plenty of rabbits to be had on the gorsey rough hillsides; partridge, to a certain amount, in the barley stubbles when September came; snipe and woodcock in the marshy bits of copse and moorland, and trout and grayling in the pools of the many rushing brooks which came down to join the one at Bodavon. Harold was an inveterate sportsman, and, with his half-boyish heartiness and careless audacity, he made good his entrance to the farm. Evan generally went with him, and his father's eldest son was still a personage in the district, besides which, both Llewellyn and his mother liked his company; he was a good listener, a quality which will always cause a man to be thought agreeable. He really cared to hear and know what others were thinking and feeling, a rarer gift than is generally recognised. Most persons only attend just enough to what is said to enable them to reply, not to agree with it. He was sometimes a little absent, when his mind wandered off to the numerous perplexities which he had on hand at that moment, but he generally brought himself up in time to recover the thread of the discourse, and to utter the proper monosyllable in reply, so as to conceal his mental excursion, and he was popular accordingly.

It was the beginning of September, which Harold had talked of so pertinaciously as considerably to bore his friends, and he and his brother had been out hard at work on a broiling day after different birds and beasts without any very great results.

"That dog 's not worth anything but to be shot himself, and I gave such a price for him last year! Fie Ponto," said Harold, when the young pointer made another blunder, "I can't stand trudging through the heather any longer in this abominable heat, and getting nothing. I shall go up to the farm and ask for a drink of milk or something, Evan; you can do as you please." And he pulled off his wide-

awake, as he lay down disconsolately under the scanty shelter of the biggest stone he could find, and wiped his forehead, while he comforted himself under his troubles with a cigar.

"The sun 's enough to bake one to bricks to-day, it 's awfully close on this side the hill. (What a view it is down that valley and across to the mountains !) It 'll be cooler up at Brynfeldyn, and we can take some of the partridge there ourselves for old granny," answered Evan, nothing loth.

They found the whole family busy in the rude bit garden; the house stood so high that only the hardiest plants could flourish there, but a few straggling flowers, white pinks, and sweet peas, and a china rose or two, grew in a sheltered place, while marigolds and poppies, pepper-mint and marjoram, were mixed up with the potatoes, chiefly for the benefit of a row of hives which stood under a little roof of thatch at the end of a grass path bordered with black-currant bushes. The girls were picking the fruit diligently, while Llewelyn stood watching a swarm of bees which he was trying to hive. They had been moving about since the morning, and were now hanging in a black pendant cluster, buzzing and humming, from a low bough of a misshapen old apple tree.

"You 'd better not come too near," said old granny composedly, as she sat by, knitting as usual at a furious pace.

"Why, *you* are not afraid," answered Evan, approaching cautiously to the living cluster, with its cloud of excited skirmishers flying round somewhat menacingly. The low hum and buzz sounded full of living, active meaning, like the distant sound of a London street.

"The bees have their likes and dislikes, the same as other folk. They 'll let Essie do what she pleases them, but they won't stand Gwenny 'vach' anyhow, they mayn't fancy you either," answered the old miling shrewdly.

"I can't bear them flying just bang up against me, they look so fierce," said Gwenny the little, pouting.

"That 's because you fight 'em so. If you 'd be still so would they be," observed her sister, quietly.

"I can't think where they find their food up here; there 's not enough in the garden, one would think, to nourish a single skip."

"They 're out the best part of the day on the hills; the gorse is full of sweets, and so was the heather, so long as it lasted; only sometimes they 're caught by a storm with their burdens and can't get home, and you find lots of 'em lying dead. But the mountain honey 's much the best, folk always think."

"Do you mean the queen is inside that big black moving bunch of bodies and wings?" said Harold to Gwenny "vach," with his cigar in his mouth, and keeping by her side at a safe distance from danger. "How horrid hot it must be inside. I should n't like to be her majesty anyhow, nor any of her courtiers either, hanging on one to another by their arms and legs for all these hours."

"Is it to get a good place in the new hive that they are so zealous in paying their court to the queen, I wonder, or is it a real feeling for her?" said Evan, watching curiously.

"It 's such a late swarm it 'll do no good this year. Llewelyn need n't take so much trouble, we might better smother them at once—they 'd cost too much to feed," said old granny, in her sweet voice.

"You don't kill the bees, surely, Essie, after they 've been working for you so hard all the summer," said Evan reproachfully; "it 's very ungrateful to rob them at last and murder them into the bargain."

"I never thought of that," answered she thoughtfully.

"I 'll send you one of the new kind of hives, with a 'super' at the top, which saves their lives," he began, eagerly explaining and describing, and altogether forgetting his own impecuniosity.

"They 'd cost a deal more than the honey's worth to nourish them with sugar all winter, new-fangled hives or not," said granny, dryly.

"Can't you sell them, then? That would be better than smothering them," cried Evan.

"It must be 'a gift or gold,' they say; the bees would fly away if they thought they shall be wrong come by; but if you shall think well to try them yourself, Mr. Evan, we shall send them down to Bodavon, and welcome to them you shall be."

"I wonder whether my aunt would mind," answered Evan, hesitatingly.

"She do not seem to mind much what you shall do, Mr. Evan, whatever it shall be; I hope you do mind to please her so well," said old Gwenny significantly.

"You must be patient with the bees, and firm with them, and not give way too much, and yet not seek to drive what won't be driven," went on Llewelyn, after he had shaken the refractory swarm into a reversed hive with a firm, deliberate hand, and then turned it down on a cloth. The excited colony flew wildly in and out for some time, but finally seemed to make up their minds to their new home, their angry murmurs subsided, and they gradually prepared to settle down.

"Are you talking of the bees or the Kefn Glas men, Llewelyn?" said Evan, laughing. "One seems nearly as hard to tackle as the other."

"I 'd rayther have to do with the bees, if you please, Mr. Evan; they 're wiser than the men, out and out, and understand their business better, though I did think to-day as these ones would have been off altogether."

"I wish somebody could have handled the swarm down there as well. Thorne 's the longest head and the best man too below there; it 's he that keeps the rest up to the struggle; but I wish he had a bit more tact, and weren't so hard in his manner.—there 's not much 'yield' to be got out of *him*, and it 'll be fought out now to the bitter end," said

Evan with a sigh, but it was for his own share in the troubles quite as much as for the matter itself.

"See here, Evan," interrupted Harold, with his mouth full of black currants from Gwenny, and cream which Essie had just brought him from the dairy, "why don't you have some of this? I can recommend the mixture highly! And it's much better than talking of strikes."

CHAPTER XI.

OVER THE PEAT-FIRE.

DURING the next few weeks, the brothers were in and out of the farm at Brynfelyn many times, and for all sorts of reasons. Sometimes it was to take refuge from the mountain showers, when the rain came down like a water-spout, and the dashing, roaring streams were soon out all over the hillsides, coursing like silver threads among the brown purple velvet of the fern, and moss, and heather, laying all the sheep-paths under water. It was good fun, so they found, to crouch over the low peat fire on the hearth and dry their clothes, while they assisted Essie in making thin oatcakes on a flat iron plate, and gave still more efficient help in eating them, hot and buttered. They learned how to make furmety from Gwenny "vach," and the best way of curing bacon from Mrs. Llewelyn, and the history of stots and steers from her son.

"I never had so much useful knowledge involuntarily put into me since I was born," exclaimed Evan, one day, when the rain had been more persistent than usual, and they were all sitting in the wide dark chimney nooks, guarding the fire from the splashes of water which came heavily down the great chimney, straight from heaven. The sheltered peat embers threw a low red glow upon the bright

young faces backed by the large shadowy room, dark at best, with its small windows in the thick walls. The plates of cakes had been emptied; the honeycomb, which Harold had claimed, as having helped, he said, in hiving the bees, had been disposed of; Gwenny was washing up the tea-cups; like Welsh folk, as they were, they began to sing. Essie drew her three-legged stool close to her grandmother, who sat in her great arm chair, in a more benign frame of mind than usual towards the revels which were going on under her own eye.

The girls' musical stock consisted chiefly of hymns, but Harold had greatly enlarged the borders of their knowledge, and catches, and very secular choruses, were following each other in tolerably melodious succession under his orders.

"Now, Essie, you must join in there after me. Evan, why on earth don't you sing? Gwenny, you'll spoil it all if you laugh so! Now then, again!" shouted he, beating time noisily with a poker of direction. He had little ear, and no voice, but a sense of time which would have done credit to a drummer boy.

"That E sharp of yours was horribly out of tune, Harold," put in Evan, quietly, at last. "You'd really better sing with one of the girls; they'd keep you straight; they know the catch better than you do, already. You began at least half a tone higher than you ended, and that's a very ugly harmony you've chosen."

"You take such music airs on yourself that there's no bearing you, Evan," replied Harold, good-humouredly. "It's my own song, and I've a right to sing it out of tune if I please. Just you find a better if you can, that's all!"

But Evan had now risen and opened the door to watch the weather. The drifting rain was over, and from their great elevation they could look down on the sweeps of dark cloud and white mists which filled up the course of the valley below them as with a mighty river. The veil was gradually lifting from one great purple peak after another in the distance, while every detail in the wide spreading land-

scape, as it came in sight, was exquisitely distinct and clear in the moist evening air. The rich plum colour over the mountains, which so often appears after rain, and is quite unlike any hue ever seen in the low lands, was now set off by the autumn tints of golden brown of the fern, and dead heather, and moss in the nearer foregrounds—the effect being brilliant in the extreme. Just below the little platform on which the grey old house, with its rough barns and outhouses, was set, ran a stream crossed by some flat slabs of stone, over which it was now foaming and rushing at a furious pace, plunging down the hill with sudden turns and leaps among the rocks, dashing and splashing as it tumbled onwards in its headlong hurry.

“The stream shall be so deep as over your knees by the bridge and in the hollow,” observed Essie in a low voice, coming up behind him, and looking out at the wet world.

“It shall go down very quick, if you shall stay a little,” added Gwenny, over her sister's shoulder.

“What a queer lock this is, to be sure, for a house door,” said Harold, joining the party.

A large square log of wood was thrust laterally into a deep hole in the thick stone wall, and could be pulled out a few inches at night across the outer door so as to keep it most efficiently closed.

“It has always been like that from the beginning, as far as mother and I do know,” said Llewelyn.

“I suppose it dates from the time when robbers battered at the door with a tree or a stone, to break their way in,” observed Evan, examining it curiously.

“I think it would be more them that had a grudge, in the old times, that would want for to come in, not for any great deal they would find inside to take. Breeding lambs is not great fortunes, as we 've ever done,” replied Llewelyn laughing.

“You moved the calves up from the close before the storm?” enquired old Gwenny, in a low voice, parenthetically.

"I looked to them when it grew so black," answered he, in the same tone. Then, turning to Evan, he went on, "But for all that, I say, when you do come for to be master at Plas Dhu (which God forbid that you should, with your so honoured mother alive), do you take an old man's advice, and stick to the land; you 'd have plenty of it, if it were well guided. There you know where you are and what you 're going to! You 're in God Almighty's hands, so to speak, and you takes your chance of the weather, and the crops, and the stock. But as to them furnaces and pits, and smeltings down yonder, what your father's so fond of, there you 're in the hands of men, if one may say so; and where are you, with a strike one time, and a fall in trade another? You 're up one day at the top of the tree, and down to-morrow, like, in the ditch—gold running in like water one year, and nothing coming in next twelve-month but losses!"

"Yes, but you must understand how to deal with the land, Llewelyn, to make it answer, and that 's just what I don't do, nor anything else much," Evan said, with half a sigh. "I should have been better off if my father had bred me up to know something and to do something, if it had been but shoemaking, than to be hanging on like this, waiting for something or nothing to happen."

"Then why don't you set to, and learn," observed the old man, gravely. "It 's not too late at your so young age. The land, when it 's well managed, gives back what it gets; if you do well by it, it will do well by you. There is nothing in this world so honest as land!"

"Why should I trouble myself? What does it signify what one does? What does anything signify, for that matter, but that there 's the weather clearing beautifully, and we shall get back to Bodavon quite dry?" replied Evan, recovering himself, and laughing off his momentary seriousness. His inkling of better things passed off from his mood as quickly as the shower. With his indolent, pleasant ways, his popularity, his half-hearted efforts after

right, without ever choosing to look at facts in the face, or to see the consequences of what he was doing, or where he was going, he was a more dangerous companion than many a much worse man—all the more so, indeed, for his undeniably good intentions to the world in general; he would not have hurt a fly if he could have helped it, yet few men were capable of giving more pain, or doing more harm to those who came across his self-indulgent path.

CHAPTER XII.

CILIAN WANTS A CHANGE.

As Mrs. Randolph became more engrossed with her nephews she saw less and less of Cilian, except at dressing times in the morning and evening, and knew less how she occupied her time. The girl had grown uneasy and thoughtful, sometimes almost sullen.

"She 's so uncommonly changed from what she was when first she came here to me," said the old lady one day as they were all three sitting at dessert after an early dinner. There was a glimpse through the great trees of the garden to the hill beyond, and from where she sat she could see Cilian's tall, erect form, crossing the brook and climbing the steep path to the village, with the big black dog by her side. Gelert was very fond of her, and generally followed her when he could. "I can't make her out at all," went on Mrs. Randolph, moodily, "she hardly answers, except 'yes' and 'no,' when I speak to her, and she used to tell me such a deal of things that were quite amusing. I almost think sometimes that I 'd better look out for someone else, only I like her better than any girl I ever had with me, she 's got so much stuff in her, of one sort and another, and is n't frightened when I storm a bit,

which I must do sometimes when the rheumatism is bad, and I feel as if I should like to beat you all round. But, there, she forgot my gruel last night, and to do up my cap this morning, and began to cry when I spoke to her, so unlike herself, and I 'm sure I don't know what I said to vex her, or whatever to do about it. But I 'm a great ass to talk so to you two foolish boys, that could n't give a sensible opinion if you tried ever so concerning house matters!"

In spite of these complaints, however, Mrs. Randolph was greatly disturbed and surprised when, a few days after, in the course of her ministering labours, Cilian began, hesitatingly—

"If you shall please, missis, that you can make it quite convenient for me to leave so soon as you shall be suited with somebody else, I should not think to go before!"

"Convenient for you to leave? Why, what can the child mean?" cried Mrs. Randolph, angrily. "You don't think really of going, Cilian? Why, deuce take it, what's the matter with things here? You 've as good a home as ever girl had, or could want to have, unless you 'd take the young man from Kefn Glas, which you won't, you say! You 'd better think better of it, and talk over it again with your sister," and the old lady struck her gold-headed cane hotly on the floor. "Have n't I been as kind as I could to you? and if I 'm a bit cross sometimes, you don't mean you care for that from a sick old woman!"

"You 've been as good as gold, missis," said Cilian, in a low voice, "but I must go all the same, I 'm thinking of leaving service, it is n't not to go to any other place that I want to leave."

And in spite of the most earnest remonstrances she kept to her determination. "I want a change," was all the explanation that she would give, the most hopeless and unsatisfactory of all possible reasons, against which all argument is in vain.

She would listen to no one's advice about her future,

made her own arrangements without consulting anybody, and finally went off, no one knowing how to cope with her proud independence, responsible as she was to no person.

"She 's grown so headstrong and obstinate," said Mrs. Randolph, irritably, the day she started, "I can't make out what she 's going for, nor where she 's going to! And she 's grown up as comfortable a place as there is in England and Wales, though I say it that should n't, perhaps. I was as fond of her almost as if she 'd been my own child, and yet all I could get out of her was that she 'd heard of something to suit her at Nottingham, and was going to join a friend here; so ungrateful, when she knows I shan't get anyone to suit me as well as her. Servants are not what they were in my young days. All for dress and feathers and such like! Though, to do Cilian justice, she never seemed to care for finery a bit. That 's why I always like to have a handsome girl about me, when I can get her. It 's the plain ones who are all so flirty and forward—the pretty girls have the advances made for them, and so they don't trouble to make them for themselves, which is much more convenient for them, and for me too."

"They 're all much of a muchness as far as I can see," said Harold, lying back in his chair, luxuriously, half asleep.

"Much you know about it. What will the handsome ones, or the plain ones either, care for you?" answered his aunt, taking a pinch of snuff. "I declare I never will set my heart upon girls again, no, nor boys neither, whatever you may think, my young masters," she went on, returning to her grievance and looking grimly at her nephews.

"You 're quite welcome to pitch into the girls for me, Aunt Randolph," replied Harold, who was now sufficiently promoted into favour to be allowed to answer her back again, "but as to the boys, they 're not to blame! You know it was Eve led Adam into mischief, not Adam Eve, nor fellow, and the Bible says so."

"And ate the fruit and then went and told of her! A pretty fellow! The first man began well! I always did

think that was the very ugliest trick man ever committed, and he's done a many more mean things since that time, too, for one to choose out of. Eh, Evan, what have you got to say for your kind?"

But Evan was silent, and contributed nothing to this religio-historical disquisition. He was too busy, apparently, cleaning his gun, as he sat in the window-seat with his back to the light. The dog Gelert came up and laid a moist nose of affection upon his knee. He stooped over the big black head and rubbed it gently and affectionately behind the ears, but said nothing, while Harold, who had been away for some days at Plas Dhu, was telling, rather more voluminously and importantly than was necessary, how much trouble he had had with things at home, and the great help he had afforded his father in his affairs during Evan's absence.

"That's all very well to say," said his aunt, at last, "but your father's a bigger fool than I take him for (and his best friend never called him *that*), if he stands your meddling and muddling in any of *his* concerns. Why, Evan's worth two of you any day, and I don't believe he's ever known a tenth part about what's done and what isn't done in the trade, so you'd better hold your tongue, Master Harold. 'It's I who made the coach to go, quoth the fly on the wheel!'" muttered the old lady, half laughing at her own wrath. "And now I'll just go to bed as well as I can without Cilian—humph!" she snorted, "with this wretched girl after me, that I can't bear the sight of, and that claws the clothes on and off me as if I were a cart horse."

CHAPTER XIII.

“STANDING WITH RELUCTANT FEET,
WHERE THE BROOK AND RIVER MEET,
WOMANHOOD AND CHILDHOOD FLEET.”

THE next day was a bright, crisp autumn morning; there was a glow of rich tints on the hillsides, and the woods in the valleys were brilliant in their transitory glory of red and yellow leaves, when Harold set off as usual with his gun over his shoulder, and a retriever by his side, for the hills beyond and around Brynfelyn.

“And you ’re a lazy fellow, Evan, not to come with me. such a nice day and all, let alone the sport!” cried he.

“You only killed one lark and missed a rabbit the last time you were out—if you call that sport!” said his brother, rousing himself out of a deep reverie.

“You ’d get a first-rate walk, and be no end the better for it, if there wasn’t a rabbit’s tail to be seen,” retorted Harold sagely, but making no impression on his brother.

After wandering about alone till evening he ended at the farmhouse, and entering at the open door found the great wide kitchen unwontedly silent. The old mistress had been summoned to a sick neighbour’s in the valley below. Her strong-minded wit and clear judgment often caused her to be consulted as a “wise woman” in all sorts of troubles, and her “simples” and her common sense made her sometimes a better doctor than most of those “licensed poisoners,” as Mrs. Randolph constantly called the faculty.

As the day drew on, however, and she did not return, Essie had been sent by her father, as the most knowing and careful of the sisters, to bring her grandmother up the long and steep ascent. There was no one to be seen either at the spinning-wheel in the corner, or in the cool dairy with its drenched floor, or in the washhouse, as Harold im-

patiently ascertained, after opening one door after another unceremoniously. The house was so quiet that the chickens were walking in and out according to their pleasure, with no one to interfere.

"What, Gwenny! Essie!" called he again and again, when down the narrow black oak stairs appeared Gwenny "vach," who had gone up to tidy herself after the day's work was over. With a sort of innocent pleasure in making her pretty little self look as pretty as possible, she had twisted some bright red poppies in her dark brown hair, which was brushed and shining, according to her best lights, while some more of the flowers were stuck in the bosom of her trim striped white and blue linsey jacket. She had ornamented herself from the mere innate love of feeling fair, such as one may suppose the birds and butterflies to have when they come out in their best summer raiment, for she expected no one, and would have been quite content if no eyes had seen her but her sister's and her grandmother's.

"Hey!" cried Harold, taken aback, "ta, ta, ta, you do look awfully stunning to-day, Gwenny, I will say that!"

He had hardly before realised her separate individuality. The two girls were mixed up in one fair picture in his mind, and he had never troubled himself to separate the items, or ascertain what he thought of each by herself. Indeed he had flirted so impartially with both at once, that even their sharp-eyed old grandmother herself had never suspected that any mischief could arise from such straightforward intercourse. He was not at his ease in cultivated society, and the girls at Brynfelyn were exactly to his taste—merry, good-tempered, simple-hearted, jolly, as he had himself summed up their merits. At first he had sought their society from mere vacuity of mind and want of something to do, but as he became more and more intimate with them, the pleasant sense of the good, true, honest character of the whole family had appealed to the best part of him.

He found himself now holding the girl's hand in his,

he hardly knew how, and looking into her face as she explained, with downcast eyes, where the rest of the family were gone, blushing as she spoke with a quite new consciousness at the expression in his countenance.

"I was away all last week—not to please myself, I can tell you," he said, after a moment, watching the shadow of the long dark lashes on the round dimpled cheek, with its vivid colour, and not troubling himself to disguise his admiration.

"Yes," answered she, with one bright look up at him, quickly lowered, "we heard as you shall be gone."

"I was wanted down at Plas Dhu; they 're in a pretty mess there, and now Evan's not allowed inside the house (you must n't tell, but that 's the truth of it), there are all sorts of things to do, and nobody to do them, and I had to be up and down for 'em morning, noon, and night, and a pretty bore it was, I can tell you. My mother does n't think anything 's done right except it is Evan does it, and my father 's in such an infernal temper that the house is like hell sometimes, I can't help thinking."

"I am so sorry," said Gwenny, with heartfelt interest. She was touched and delighted with his confidence, although she knew all the facts as well before. "It must be so sad with the strike and all, and everybody with such a deal of cumber."

"And when I 'd nothing to do with the mischief; it wasn't my fault a bit that they 're all squabbling like a pack of spiteful cats, and it 's an abominable nuisance that I should get the rough side of all their tongues in this way," complained Harold, enjoying the new pleasure of unlimited belief, and the soothing syrup of sympathy.

"What a shame!" cried Gwenny, lighting up with flaming cheeks at this picture of frightful injustice, "and you working so hard and shall do so much for everybody!"

For the first time a further intention came into Harold's head—it would be very pleasant to have such a nice little cheerful companion through life. "Girls are always good-

tempered," thought he—what sort of women the girls would turn into it did not occur to him to trouble himself about. To have somebody always to agree with him, and bound to see the best of him—a luxury he had by no means enjoyed of late—seemed to him the very best thing he could do for himself in the present uncomfortable circumstances of the family. The immediate satisfaction of the impulse of the moment was the only principle of action with him, and he began again hotly—

"I say, little Gwenny, what have you been doing with yourself since I went away last week? Were you sorry when I did not come back again as I said I should?"

"Yes, rather," answered Gwenny, slowly, in a whisper, and playing with the unfortunate poppies, which she picked to pieces. The growing fancy within her was fast fanning into a flame with the sudden warmth of his tone.

"Yes, rather!" repeated Harold, indignantly. "Is that all you've got to say to me! I'd better go away again as fast as I can, if you're such a little cold-hearted piece of goods."

"No, I'm not cold-hearted a bit, but you're in such a hurry," answered Gwenny, pouting, retiring towards the window, to the protection of the big armchair, though no grandmother was in it.

"Well, and I ought to be in a hurry, and I think you ought to say so! If what I want is a good thing, the sooner I get it the better. And you *are* a good thing, little Gwenny," said Harold, pursuing her round her entrenchments.

"I didn't know you shall be courting me a bit when you went away," answered she mischievously, edging away on the other side of the great table.

"No more I was last week, but I am now, and that's the important part of it. In very great earnest too," replied Harold, hunting her round the room, and at length getting hold of her plump little person in a corner and kissing her vigorously and repeatedly in spite of her resistance. It was

the kind of play that goes on between a couple of water wagtails, the cock pursuing the hen in and out of the bushes, and to and fro the lawn, till he has stopped her doublings and retreatings, and after a little preliminary fighting and quarreling, they make it up upon the next branch.

"Look here, Gwenny," said he, when he had taken possession of both hands, "I want to talk to you quite seriously. Suppose you and I were to set our horses together, what should you think of that? Would you like to be my little wife?" he added, coming to the point.

"But, even if I should like it, what would granny say to such a thing? I know she would n't hear of it a bit," replied she, laughing, and blushing in his grasp.

"Hang your granny! It is n't your granny I want to miss me when I 'm away, or to marry me when I 'm here," insisted her intending future grandson, irreverently. "Just answer for your own little self. I 'm sure you 're very fond of me. You know you are, Gwenny."

"Am I?" replied the little hen-bird provokingly, shaking her feathers, as it were, and making for further shelter, after dodging behind the great wheel.

"You 're a provoking little puss, and I 'd better just go away!" cried Harold, half-angrily, stopping in the middle of a second chase round the room. "You 're not worth the trouble I 'm taking for you, I declare! I shall just leave you to go your own ways, and then we shall see!"

"But what is it you want of me?" said Gwenny, turning in her flight, and looking an extremely tempting little morsel, with her colour raised, and her bright eyes sparkling with mischief.

He was silent as he stood still looking at her, and she came nearer and still nearer.

"Thy nymph is light and shadow-like.
If thou follow her, she 'll fly from thee;
If thou fly from her, she 'll follow thee,"

says the old Elizabethan glee. Suddenly he dashed round her defences, and took firm grasp of her in his arms.

"There, now, you silly little girl, I 've got you quite tight, and you 'd better not try to run away again from what you like just as well as I do, but just let me ask your father about it, and see what old Gwenny can say against us two. I 'm sure it will be all nonsense," he said valiantly, in her absence.

As he spoke, the sounds of granny's approach were heard, as she came slowly up the path with Essie by her side.

"I 've ordered her skim-milk for the dropsy; it 's just the finest thing she can take," said she to her granddaughter, as they came in at the door. She had been kept much longer by her neighbour's illness than she had at all expected, and sorely she rued the delay when she saw with her keen glance what had been doing in her absence.

"Well, Mrs. Brynfelyn, you 're just in time!" blurted out Harold, taking the bull by the horns. "Gwenny 'vach' and I have found out we 're just made for each other, and we 're not going to part again. She 'll make me a capital little wife, and you won't say nay to my mother's son, I 'm sure."

"Mr. Harold," answered the old woman gravely, sitting down in her great chair with her usual dignity and self-possession, but with a beating heart, "you know that your father would never hear speak of such a thing, so what 's the use of beginning about your so good mother? And you shall have not any business for to be trying to get the heart of my little girl up here, when you cannot say there is any chance he shall be willing, and you not a penny of your own, nor home to take her to, which it is not right nor proper you should be living on charity," said old Gwenny, shrewdly. "She is not for the like of you in quality, and her father will never let you have her to be looked down on, nor till yours shall give proper consent, you may be sure of that!"

"I'll go down to Plas Dhu this very night, and you shall see! And she's right and fit for any place under the sun!" cried Harold, undauntedly, and drawing Gwenny's arm within his. Besides his boyish vexation at the opposition he met with, which only made him the more determined to have his own way, a real feeling for the little girl who was clinging so fondly to him began to make a man of him, and infuse some earnest stout thoughts into his aimless existence, driven by the winds and tossed on the waves of his own selfishness as it had been hitherto.

Little Gwenny looked white and frightened; the whole affair had been so sudden that she had had no time as yet to realise on what crazy foundations her visions rested.

"You shall better go then directly," said the old woman proudly. "Whether you shall best come back we shall see. We are not such as to be forced to beg a place for our little girl, though she may not be wife either for the Lancasters of Plas Dhu." She felt dismally as if she were shutting the stable door after her poor little filly had been stolen, and was angry at herself for her want of foresight; but, at all events, the mischief should not go any further. The love which could only date from that very afternoon was not likely, she thought, to be very deeply rooted, and would soon die out. "If I'd only got back half an hour sooner, it would n't have happened at all," said she, cynically, under her breath.

Little Gwenny followed Harold to the door with a blank face of dismay, watching him bravely as he turned and turned again, and indeed long after he was out of sight.

"You'd better put it out of your head, child, as soon as you can; they'll never hear speak of it at Plas Dhu. Mr. Lancaster's all the prouder that he's not been born to it, and the young master is not one to hold to anything long, if there is trouble to go through in winning it. What goes in at one side of his head flies out at the other, and his heart is not much deeper than his head."

"I'm sure that's not true," cried Gwenny, her indigna-

tion at the reflection on her friend enabling her to stand up even to her dreaded grandmother. "Why should he come courting me, if he did not care for me? He had no call up here, in this so out of the way place."

"Why did he come? Because he 'd nothing else to do just now, and it served to fill up the time, and amused him to go on dilly-dallying. And now the straw will go out blazing, because there is no root of fuel under it, and he seeing lots of people and going to lots of places, as he does," said old granny, relentlessly.

Essie had sat by very silently during the whole scene. She had seemed almost paralysed as she watched her sister intently in such unexpected circumstances. At length, she got up and kissed her fervently, taking her hand to show how she stood by her, and stroking it fondly, as poor Gwenny began to sob piteously with annoyance and over-excitement, as well as from real feeling.

They were still standing thus when Llewelyn came in. "Why, what 's the coil about, then?" he said, surprised. He was almost more vexed at what had taken place, when he was told, than his mother.

"There cannot any good come of such a fancy, child, and I won't hear tell anything about it," said he, in a decided tone, marching up and down the great old kitchen in his annoyance.

"But, father, he is very nice, is Mr. Harold. You thought so, too, and he has been welcome in this house all this time," Gwenny ventured to say.

"More fool I to let those two young jackanapes into the place, then," sighed he, "but it seemed to me that an empty knob he wears where his head ought for to be, was full of birds, and rabbits, and trout, and not of making love, however, or I shall have been for sending him to the right about long before this."

The girls were both silent as they made preparations for the meal after the day's work, generally so cheerful a one. Very little was said by anyone, a dismal contrast to the

usual happy evening mood of the family, and very soon the two went off to bed together, declaring that they were tired.

"And that 's the sort of temper yon young fool has brought our so nice cheerful girls to! I wish I 'd cut off my head sooner than that either of those men had set foot at Brynfelyn," said the father, looking grimly after his daughters. "I wish, at least, it had been Evan, but he 's no thought of either of 'em, that 's clear, anyhow."

"I ought to have thought to it before; those feather heads are surest to catch fire if there 's so much as a spark anywhere about, and there 's no knowing who shall be scorched that get in their unlucky ways," said old Gwenny, cynically, "but it 's only come to a blaze to-day, so I 'm in hopes it shall go out as quick."

The girls had reached their room in the roof. The house was only two stories high, and the whole of the upper part consisted of garret. Their great old chamber was crossed with projecting beams, each consisting of a solid tree squared, and was lighted by three windows in the low gables, opening on the glorious view down the valley. It was full of their childish treasures, the odds and ends of invaluable nothings which had hitherto seemed to them the most precious things in their lives. Here was their sanctum where neither had ever had a secret from the other, or a feeling which they had not hitherto fully shared in the even tenor of their short happy years.

They both dimly felt the strange gulf on the brink of which they were now standing, the end of the old reign of common interests and sympathies, of common thoughts and wishes; their paths were beginning to diverge, who could tell how widely, and to what different goals? Would their love stand the strain of the change, and keep warm under the chilling touch of what might prove rivalry between them. Little Gwenny leant against the great carved black oak post, almost as big as the trunk of a tree, which supported the canopy of the bed, with its blue check curtains, in which

they had together slept their Child-sleeps so soundly. She began a little hesitatingly, uncertain as she was of what her sister was thinking—"I was so 'fraid, dear, that you might not have liked for Mr. Harold to be after courting me, and you the oldest and best, that ought by rights to be first."

"Oh, no," said Essie quickly, with a long-drawn tone of assent and surprise, which was very satisfactory as to such an idea having never entered her head even in a dream. "You are the nicest and the prettiest, and I am very please you should like him, and that he should like you best. I never so much as thought of Mr. Harold that way."

"Why for? he is so very much good and grand," answered Gwenny, naturally proud of her prize, and anxiously bent on vindicating its transcendent merits. Her little apology for being chosen first had been very prettily spoken, but once quieted on the score of not having made her sister unhappy, she was not quite satisfied with the amount of admiration in Essie's tone and manner for her friend. "What for wouldn't you think of him that way when he 's the best man we 've ever seen?" persisted she a little uneasily.

"I should never think to look on Mr. Harold when his brother should be by," replied Essie meditatively, as she sat with her head in her hands on the low window seat of one of the deep latticed casements. The black darkness was behind her, and the dim light of their one candle shining on her pretty downcast face threw the shadow of her long eyelashes on her cheeks, which looked pale, and the stray locks which she had just untied hung down dishevelled, with a little careless curl here and there, making her look very unlike her usual cheerful, sunny, neat, childlike self.

"Mr. Evan!" cried Gwenny in amaze, "but who shall ever be thinking of Mr. Evan? He shall be like the top of the Idris mountain when it do have its snow bonnet on! Why most part he do not seem for to hear what is said to

him, he is so absent ! And he shall like granny best of us all three, I 'm sure, and shall talk to her and think of her three parts of the time, and not seem scarce to see if one is in the room, nor if we has got on our Sunday things, or only the quite so shabby milking jackets. Now, Mr. Harold he shall be quite different, he do always see and hear, and know all about our things, he shall."

"I only answer when you shall say about which is the best man," replied her sister, rather coldly. "It is not whether Mr. Evan shall not talk to you nor to me prevents that he is the first altogether hereabouts or anywheres indeed, that folks do know of all round !"

"If he is not best to me, how shall I care how good he do be," cried Gwenny, with an unconscious parody of the Marquis of Montrose's indignant protest. "And Mr. Harold he is altogether quite so good and grand as I shall want for anything, and there is not no one about here for to compare with him for nothing ! And it is not so very kind of you, Essie, not to be more please and glad that he do choose me and want to marry with me !" went on the girl, kindling at the thoughts of her wrongs and the remembrance of her successes.

"I *am* please, dear, if you are please, and if you shall be happy ; and I hope that granny shall be more conformable, and that his father, Mr. Lancaster, shall be kind. Very please, indeed, and very sorry that things should look a little black, but they will mend surely," said Essie cordially, and then the two sisters kissed affectionately and lay down tenderly side by side.

But the gulf of their waning sympathies was there between them, deep, and opening wider and wider, never again to be filled ; the course of their lives could never again run side by side in the old flowery careless paths. It is well that we do not see where we are drifting, or where the new ways we tread may lead. Such wrenches come upon us for the most part gradually, and in the dark ; they do not give their stern messages of separation and change till we are

half prepared by the alteration in our own thoughts and feelings to suffer from them less acutely. Though perhaps this may be the dreariest reflection of all to those who would fain believe in the changelessness of true affection even when all else has changed about it.

CHAPTER XIV.

"THE WINTER OF OUR DISCONTENT."

MRS. LANCASTER'S life was, indeed, a painful one; her husband's temper, always difficult, had now become almost unbearable—everything that everybody said and did was wrong. The general storm of reproaches which he now continually poured forth fell chiefly upon his wife as always at hand. Her beloved Evan was forbidden the house, and now even Harold, who, as she said to herself, was better than nothing, was hardly ever at home, but had forsaken them for Bodavon, "and quite natural too, poor fellow, it must be much more cheerful," she added, with a sigh.

She was an indolent woman at all times, and her occupations never interested her enough to be absorbing. She sat now for hours with a book beside her, or some knitting in her hands for form's sake, but she was really neither working nor reading. Even her household duties, which till now she had liked to potter slowly over, with kind intentions towards everybody connected with her, had lost their charm. She could not bear Cattus's implied commiseration at everything done or left undone, or Ianto's muttered imprecations, in most intelligible Welsh, upon the master's harshness to his eldest son, who had much more right to things as representing the family, in the old man's eyes, than an upstart like Lancaster.

Mr. Lancaster had made a furious onslaught upon the

management, or rather mismanagement, of the house. "You 're just ruining me with your waste and extravagance!" he shouted at his wife. "Every lazy beggar about the place is gormandising and swilling at my expense, while you sit there wasting your time and doing nothing that 's of any mortal use to any one! I 'll turn every man-jack out of the house, and begin afresh from the bottom, and then we 'll see who 's master!"

It was all true in one sense, only that the state of things was mainly his own doing, and as he contented himself with swearing at everybody all round, dismissing a few incapables, and getting others equally incapable in their places, who, besides, had no tradition of knowledge of the work required, and wasted as much as those before them, he simply brought the whole machine almost to a standstill in the general discontent. Every soul in the house was in a state of chronic rebellion. If it had not been for Cattus, who persisted in coming to look after her mistress, Mrs. Lancaster would have been half starved, while Ianto, whose position even Mr. Lancaster dared not meddle with, could be heard all over the house uttering furious complaints in a voice of thunder, as he sat, as usual, glued to his chair by rheumatism, unable to move, but striking his staff violently on the floor to emphasize his remonstrances.

It was in this unpropitious state of things that Harold arrived at Plas Dhu on his matrimonial errand. The house looked darker than ever. Something of the impending ruin seemed to be expressing itself in all the animate and inanimate things about the place—the very cocks and hens looked haggard and draggle-tailed, the hospitable windows were bleared and dingy, and the stable yard empty and woebegone, as Harold drove into it. His courage had been gradually oozing out as he came nearer home; it was no joke to face his father in his present mood, and yet he knew that nothing but a very distinct assent from Mr. Lancaster would ever make the Llewelyns part with Gwenny.

He threw the bridle to a slouching groom, whose wages

3
HASTY FEET SORROW M.L.L.

ad not been paid for months, and who was in a very bad humour as he grumbled out his complaints. Harold made his way into the kitchen, but his greeting was not much pleasanter there.

"Well, and so you shall be come home at last, my young master!" said Ianto, surlily, lifting up his eyebrows, pleasure up and down and never coming to give a hand of help to that so good mother of yours."

"You should n't have left the poor missis like this, with not a soul to speak to, and your father in such tantrums! Mr. Evan he shall not have done it if he had been let for to come home!" followed up Cattus.

"It's always 'Mr. Evan' that 's right in this house!" answered Harold, angrily, "and it 's he that has got us into half the scrapes we're in. You just leave me alone, or it 'll be the worse for you!" and he marched on with a bit of grass in his mouth and his hands in his pockets to his mother's room, where he plunged at once into the matter in hand; there was little discretion in his valour, and little valour in his discretion.

"I say, mother, I want to marry a very nice little girl, Llewelyn's daughter you know, up on the hills, near Aunt Randolph's. Her sister's called Iseult after you, and you know the old grandmother, Mrs. Brynfelyn, quite well. And you must just speak to my father and bring him round to it. It 's just the very best thing I could do," said he, with a jaunty assumption that all was perfectly straightforward and simple in his request, "and I 'm sure you 'll say so when you see her."

"Oh, Harold," cried his poor mother in dismay at the thought of a fresh subject of dispute, "what have you done? Your father 'll never give his consent, you know he won't; and how can you think of worrying him like this when he's up to the neck in troubles, besides," added Mrs. Lancaster, with tears in her eyes, "he 'll never hear of a farmer's daughter for any of you, I know."

"You know there 'd have been just the same hullabaloo whoever I 'd chosen ! Nothing would ever have pleased him that pleased me," said Harold, philosophically, "but if you won't do it, why then I must ; so here goes, the sooner it 's over the better. What was my father better born, I should like to know, for him to look down on a farmer's daughter ? Let him tell me that !"

It was perhaps the truth of this that made his father so furious. "You shall marry a lady, or you shan't have a sixpence from me to marry upon," he cried, as soon as Harold had opened his lips. He would hear nothing on the subject from either wife or son. "I 'll have my way, and you 'd best not try to cross me," repeated he in a louder voice each time ; even their silence seemed to aggravate his rage.

The house became "worse than the furnace for heat," as Harold declared. He cared little for his father's indignation, except so far as he was completely dependent upon him for means, and that old Gwenny had positively required his assent. But it was with rather a shamefaced look that he presented himself at the farm, and blurted out the bad result of his expedition.

"It 's just as I expected," said Mrs. Brynfelyn composedly, when she heard his account. "And now, Mr. Harold, you shall see that it is not so very well that you do me up to the hill after our little girl, till such time as you can show you can take her to wife with full consent of your friends and the so good mother. And you shall understand I am not bound to you, nor is you to her any, however. So I will wish you well, and farewell !" she said, with emphasis, and her usual calm dignity.

There was a smothered sob heard behind the door, left ajar, leading to the girls' garret, and Harold rushed at the opening, but her grandmother's authoritative voice stopped.

Gwenny, it is not fit that which you are doing ; go up your way directly."

Mrs. Brynfelyn spoke in that quiet tone of command which no one in the house had ever dared to disobey since the memory of man, and Gwenny "vach" retreated in awe, but, as there was a slight preliminary scuffle at the foot of the stairs, perhaps the leave-taking may have been a little more tender than the code of requirements at eighty-eight thought advisable.

CHAPTER XV.

TO THE BITTER END.

ALTHOUGH Barnard had heard nothing at Bodavon concerning Evan which could make him uneasy, yet even he perceived that his chance with Cilian was growing less and less by her continued absence from Kefn Glas.

"Surely I do hope and believe as she do come again home so soon as the strike be over," said Choicy to him sadly. She was nearly as anxious as he could be for the return of her sister, now that Evan had left Kefn Glas and was staying continually at Bodavon, as she had now made out to be the case; but she could hardly ask her husband to add an additional mouth to weigh upon their scanty means at such a moment; besides that, when trade was so bad, Cilian would get little employment, and could earn next to nothing by needlework. Barnard began soon to regard the strike as a sort of personal enemy.

The distress became greater; the people's little hoards were exhausted; the bedclothes, often pawned, were not redeemed at last; while the cold of winter was fast coming on: the houses looked more and more empty, the children more ragged and hollow-cheeked.

Poor Mrs. Morris was becoming almost desperate; the stock of her little shop was nearly exhausted, and she had no means of renewing it. Her credit had been stretched to

its utmost limits, and she could neither get fresh goods from the dealers who had trusted her hitherto, nor obtain payment for the old from her penniless customers. Her small savings had long been spent, and she could not endure to be sponging on her son. He had a small reserve, for he had for some time been laying by in the hope of his marriage; but it seemed to her a sort of sacrilege to infringe upon it.

"You 'd best take what money there is to the fore, mother," said he, sadly, one day; "I dunno want it."

"But I canna bear to be touching that nice little bit o' brass, lad, as thou 'st got together so nice for thi house and thi wedding, when thou shalt want it so soon, please God," said she anxiously.

She had softened wonderfully to the idea of his marriage now that there seemed to be no immediate chance of its taking place, and that the object of her jealous dislike had gone out of her sight.

"Use it, mother, and welcome, what good do it do to me? I 'm afraid as I shall ha' lots o' time to mak' more afore ever I shall be like to need it, if that ever Cilian should change her mind," sighed he.

He was a good son on the whole, though he might not have seen his duty to her so strongly if his love affairs had gone smoothly. Sorrow, however, works differently; it hardens some dispositions, which wrap themselves up as it were in a garment which shuts out all feeling for the woes of others; but with some it opens the heart to all suffering, and is a gracious inmate, "strong to consume small troubles, to commend great thoughts, good thoughts, thoughts lasting to the end."

Barnard, however, sorely wanted the help of work, and it was difficult to work steadily at accidental jobs, which alone he could now obtain, with the expectation of something always about to take place hanging over his head which was to change everything. His idleness weighed heavily upon him, he longed greatly after the pattern shop and all its interests, and grew more and more impatient for the strike

to end. Being a carpenter, he was better off than the furnacemen, as he found occasional employment up and down the immediate neighbourhood; but the flatness of trade, and the depression of everything consequent upon it, became every day more evident. He saw and heard much in his wanderings which in the limited horizon of Kefn Glas was never brought within the ken of the workmen. An inkling of the way in which different interests hang upon each other, and of the impossibility of artificially keeping up the price of labour, as of any other commodity, except for the moment, began to dawn upon his mind, however unwillingly.

Still the strike held on. There was a good deal of drinking, though no one could say where the money came from, and plenty of cases were brought before the magistrates' meetings of the sort of mischief (and worse) born of idleness and drink combined. But on the whole the people were healthier from their enforced sobriety, and in general were quiet enough.

One day Howell walked down to the point where the valley in which were the neighbouring colliery works fell in with that of Kefn Glas. The streams from the two united here in a full and brawling river, crossed by a bridge, which was the favourite gathering place of the men in their uncomfortable, self-imposed idleness. It was a tolerably fine day, and the parapets on both sides were now lined with strong athletic men doing absolutely nothing. Some leant their backs against the wall and elbows upon the top; some leaned over as far as they could reach, throwing pebbles into the water, or trying which could spit the farthest; some were smoking, with their hands in their pockets, chatting with those across the way. One group sat close to the bed of the river, for the convenience of a supply of stones to make ducks and drakes without the trouble of getting up to fetch them. A little child had been brought down in its father's strong arms, and was the centre of a joking circle of men; playing with it, petting it, laughing

noisily at it, as it ran up and down the parapet, a welcome distraction in their aimless, useless days. They were innocent, if not very lively pastimes; but it was a bitter sight to Howell to see hundreds of strong full-grown men with no better work in life, or no more interesting ways of using their leisure. A few were discussing the chances of the strike and the position of affairs, but most of them were utterly idle and listless, with no pleasure on hand except that of doing nothing.

Presently a pretty little pony carriage, drawn by a couple of grey ponies with jingling bells, came by, in which Mrs. Horwood was driving over to see Mrs. Lancaster. There was a low grunt of ill-will and discontent as it passed.

"There 's how our money goes," said one of the men, "what we earn, and what should by right belong to us, goes in them traps and horseflesh, and bells and nonsense."

And a sort of sneering cheer followed her as she passed.

"I 'd like to see them masters cut down to four shillings a week," said another, forgetting that it was by his own act that he was now in that condition.

Mrs. Horwood could hardly bear the ordeal, and when she reached Plas Dhu her colour had risen and her lips were set with the effort to keep from giving way, and avoid showing any emotion to her foes. She was a slight woman, with a colourless face; hair, eyes, and skin all of about the same tint, which was, however, redeemed from monotony by the rather stern lines of the mouth and the determined chin.

"So insolent," she said wrathfully, as she came into the low, dark sitting room, where Mrs. Lancaster sat sadly, doing nothing as usual. "I 'd no notion how matters were going on here, or I should not have risked driving over. We have not got so far as this on our side of the hill by any means, I can tell you."

"I never scarcely go now beyond my own door," replied her hostess, half crying. "I can't bear the things they say! All my life I 've been trying to do for them to the best of

my power. Many 's the time Mr. Lancaster 's wanted to take me to London, or buy a present for me, and I would n't have it done, because I could not bear to spend money when I knew it was so sorely wanted here. And this is the reward one gets! The people turn their backs upon me as I pass, if they don't do worse. Men who have eaten and drunk out of our doors for weeks, when they were sick, whose wives and children I 've looked after all these years, and helped, and slaved, and stinted myself for, are rude to me in the streets—the little ones hoot at me, till I can't bear to stir out at all."

"It is most ungrateful," replied Mrs. Horwood energetically, "but they 'll come to their senses now before long. You 've done your duty by them, and that will bear good fruit sooner or later in the long run."

"I did it because I could n't help it, not because it was right, I 'm afraid," sobbed the poor woman. "I cared for them, and how could I help giving them what they wanted when they were in trouble, and we that had been her together so many years in the old country."

Mrs. Horwood smiled superior; she was a conscientious woman, and did everything conscientiously, if a little hardly. But though no doubt Mrs. Lancaster's broth and pudding tasted all the sweeter because their donor could not help being kind, than from the more praiseworthy desire for the receiver's improvement, yet it was well known that her wholesale charities had done more harm than good in the place.

"It 's an anxious time for everybody," said Mrs. Horwood gravely, "but we 're not afraid. Things will right themselves, and the men will see what quagmires they 've been led into by those delegates—cutting their own throats—poor fellows! Each side can injure the other, no doubt, almost as much as it suffers itself, but the longest purse must win. The masters, at least the solvent ones," and Mrs. Horwood drew herself up with the proud consciousness of belonging to one of the stoutest of these last,

"are only not making interest on the capital which is there still, but the men's wages for all these idle weeks are gone for ever."

"I don't understand it," sighed poor Mrs. Lancaster, "only the misery the poor wives and children are going through with it all half breaks my heart."

"I hope it will be a lesson to them in the future not to risk so dangerous a game, and then it may save a great deal of future misery," observed Mrs. Horwood didactically.

"I wish the masters would explain more how matters are going on; and their manner is so hard and high, even when they mean well," said Mrs. Lancaster, hesitatingly, for it was known that neither Mr. Horwood nor her own husband were by any means conciliatory. "I'm sure it does a great deal of harm, and makes bad blood among the people—and all that kind of thing tells when there comes a pinch; the men's backs are up not to yield, even before the struggle has really begun."

"It's no use prophesying smooth things; the men are all wrong in their facts and their figures, and their trade notions are simply absurd; there's nothing but the reasoning of hard realities which can convince them out of notions such as they have got into their heads."

"But it's the way in which it is done," persisted Mrs. Lancaster, gently. "If the masters know they're in the right, it is so easy to be civil and kind, and just to tell them how things really stand. Manner goes such a long way! I'm sure I just wonder how much they *do* care about the manner, but they do, and one must take the fact as it stands."

"Well, it is past being a question of manners now, any-
7," answered Mrs. Horwood, a little haughtily, and rising
o. "I can't face that scene at the bridge again, so I
t just drive round by the hills, and that will take me
e hours at the very least, so I can't stay any longer. I
your sons are staying with their old aunt at Bodavon;
hall be very glad to see them at Orsedd next week if

they can come. Yes, yes, I understand, I'll write, as you may 'nt be seeing them soon." (The family quarrels were by no means secret.) Then seeing Mrs. Lancaster's tearful face, she went on more kindly—"Keep up your spirits, my dear. Don't let those people have the pleasure of seeing how much they pain you. It is just what they wish for. We keep a better police over them, I can tell you, at our works," she ended, proudly, as she got into her carriage again and folded her rugs carefully round her.

"It is n't what the police can do that I care for, only the feeling, and that 's past mending now," answered Mrs. Lancaster dolefully, as she stood on the step taking leave of her visitor.

CHAPTER XVI.

LOGIC PROVES BUT COLD COMFORT.

HOWELL was sauntering down to the bridge, just after Mrs. Horwood passed, and heard the jeering shout which followed her. He was annoyed at the tone. "Don't sneer at a woman who can't answer you back, mates. Run at the men as hard as you please!"

He kept a good deal apart from the rest at this time. The talk wearied him, the things he saw gave him pain, this was by no means the manner in which he had hoped that his ideal state of trade warfare was to have been carried out.

As he walked further away, he came upon a group sitting under the shelter of a shed, where discussion was running high; Barnard was gesticulating and declaiming earnestly as to the impossibility of wages getting up while trade continued as bad as it was at that moment. Moreover, orders he knew had again and again to be refused now the works were stopped; they were killing the very goose

that laid their golden eggs—he grew quite eloquent. Howell was fond of the young fellow, and had grieved over the gradual estrangement on account of Cilian which had come between them; he was still more pained by the way in which he saw that so hopeful a disciple was now falling away from the Union faith.

“I wish you’d come and stroll a bit with me; why, I have not seen you for ages, lad!” said he almost affectionately, as he stood looking at the group with his hands in his pockets.

Barnard joined him a little unwillingly. He thought he was in for a lecture, and Howell was no longer a prophet in his eyes, but he was still the head of the house to which Cilian belonged, and he therefore obeyed. They walked on together past the long line of empty sheds, the noisy rolling mills, now silent, the machinery standing idle; the useless tramways, along which the balls of soft red hot iron, malleable almost as wax, were no longer being wheeled by active little boys, who were now playing at marbles. No “tip girls” were to be seen at work with their trucks, adding to the hideous piles of rubbish which had been steadily growing for so many years into hills, upon which nothing appears able to grow.

The beautiful little valley was scarred and seamed past all help by man’s ugly works; the buildings were without an exception hideous in form and colour; even the refuse refuses to be clothed with vegetation, and to fall back to its old wild garden state; but the ugliest part of the sight now was in the smokeless chimneys, the silent wheels, the machinery and buildings suffering from the deterioration of disuse, the yawning cracks in the brickwork from past intense heat, the feeling of waste, and the melancholy throwing away of the bread of thousands, of opportunities going never to return, of useless sacrifices by the groups of listless men with sad, vacant, discontented, half-fed faces, who had brought about the deadlock from which they were suffering far the most.

"I wish they would n't laugh and jaw so," said Howell irritably to his companion, as they passed out of the crowd.

"There is n't much else to be done, is there, when you 've all of you brought matters to where they are now?" replied Barnard somewhat savagely. "I should like to know what you expect now to get out of the masters with trade where it is, that you go on wait, wait, wait, after this fashion. Wait, I say, on ruin!"

In general it is the single men who are the instigators of a strike. They are more independent of home ties, and can more easily seek work elsewhere; the married men are slower to join a movement in proportion to their encumbrances, and quicker to give in when the sad necessity at length arrives. But Barnard clung to Kefn Glas for many reasons, and as long as there was any chance of winning Cilian, he did not care to go permanently away.

"What shall we gain? Why, one would think, to hear you talk, that the ten per cent. in wages was the only thing in life we wanted, without caring a hang how we got it, Barny! You shall know better than that. Why it's arbitration that the best of us are after, at least I am, and it's only by the Union that we can hope to get it, with all the strength that the masters shall bring against us. And the Unions don't only mean strikes by a long way, though it's the noisy part of their work that folks mostly hear of. Why, many's been the score of strikes stopped by Unions in Durham and Yorkshire that never shall be heard of, 'cept in the small print, that I take it you don't put on your spectacles to read through, Master Barny."

"Well, I can't see what arbitration's got to do with it here anyhow; you can see for yourself that even ten per cent. reduction won't bring things straight, with the price of finished iron what it is; we could n't not hold our own against foreign work even with a bigger fall nor that, as far as I see. Anybody who can read and cypher can tell that by the price lists; you don't want no delegates for to figure up them lists, Bill; it's you that won't read the small print,

it seems to me. It 's plain enough to see for them that does n't choose for to shut their own eyes to what 's staring them in the face."

"Let the masters show their books, then, if trade 's so bad, then we shall know. Just you hearken, Barny, to what I mean to say at the meeting to-morrow," said Howell, scarcely listening to him. "The London man will be there, and we shall hear what 's right from him."

He was anxiously considering his own speech as he strolled on with his hands behind him. He was scrupulous in his desire to be fair, but somehow he had persuaded himself that the lesson of the market prices of iron and coal said nothing until the facts had been formally announced to the men by their delegates; he had put his own judgment into their hands, and he would believe nothing, however palpable, except on the evidence of those whose interest it was to keep up the agitation.

"You see —" he began, preparing to rehearse his speech, when they were met by a fresh body of noisy loiterers, and to Barnard's infinite satisfaction the conversation was interrupted.

The men had begun to grow discontented with the conduct of the struggle, and very weary of the length to which it was protracted. In a strike, unlike a lock-out, there can be no parish relief; the Union wage had diminished, and the pinch of hunger had become too keen to be endured much longer, while there was not the smallest sign of the masters giving in. Still, however, the men's pride held out, they could not bear to yield and prove to themselves that the sufferings and sacrifices of the past weeks and months had been absolutely in vain. They flattered themselves that a great public meeting would bring matters to a crisis, that that "something," which is always expected in the abstract, would at length come to pass; at all events, it would serve to pass the time, intolerable as its weariness was becoming to many of them.

The great coal shed next night was crowded with

anxious faces, and the people overflowed its limits and stood all round the door to hear the London delegate. He was a good speaker, voluble and confident; he told how everything had been done that was best for the cause by the Union, and ran proudly over the numbers affiliated, and the largeness of the subscriptions given, but he was applauded feebly compared to his reception beforetimes. He became more bitter, and declared that the masters, Mr. Lancaster, of course, among them conspicuously as the nearest, were not making war upon men, but were trying to carry their point by starving the women and children. He abused the Non-Union men even more than the masters: "these were their real enemies,"—and there were signs of adhesion from different corners of the hall ("So they are, so they are"). If only they would hold out, the golden time was at hand when wages would be greatly and permanently raised, and their rightful share of the enormous profits made by the masters secured to them. He finished by telling them that, if only they kept firm, the Union would be responsible for supporting them, even if the struggle should last for twenty years to come!

"How about last week's wage? How's a man to live on that, I should like to know?" cried a voice in the hall.

"It was scarce enough to keep body and soul together, and the box nearly empty, we all know," shouted another, with a haggard face and unkempt hair.

"Fourpence-halfpenny a man, paid last time!" cried a third.

Suddenly a man got up on a bench in the body of the hall, and began to speak in Welsh. He had the natural ready flow of words, and spoke without hesitation or hurry, very unlike the hammering and stammering of the ordinary Englishman. When addressed in their own tongue, the Welsh are wonderfully sympathetic listeners, rising to every throw of the line, responding to every appeal and change of feeling of the speaker. "They themselves," he said, "knew better than anyone what they now had to endure; it needed

no man from a distance to tell them how things stood at Kefn Glas, the misery which weighed upon them came home to each one more than any outsider could count," and he was applauded vehemently. He clinched what he said by his expressive gesture ; he had a command of his arms and hands full of meaning, which skilled workmen sometimes possess, and as he spoke the faces of the men grew painfully earnest with their rapt attention.

" They had been well off, comparatively, before the strike," he said, " but wanted to be better, and now, where were they landed ? Their wages had been pretty good, enough to live by, even with the fall that had taken place, and now where had they sunk to ? What was before them but a lower depth of destitution ? Orders were leaving the firm, and might not come back ; the longer they waited in such times, the worse terms they were likely to get."

The rapid flow of words, almost musical in their rise and fall, had a certain meaning of their own even for those who could not speak Welsh, their swell with the rising wave of argument subsiding with the sense. There were no sharp edges to the sentences, but a smooth current corresponding with the earnest gestures of his hands, hard and horny as they were, but supple and free in their motions, with an expression that could almost be understood independently of the words.

It was Barnard who got down from his perch, well satisfied ; he had refused to go on the platform as being more free to speak his mind amid the mass of the audience.

The delegate was not very strong in the national tongue, but it was easy to see that the meeting was slipping from under his grasp. He did not like the look of things, or the temper of the people, and he took advantage of the pause of excited talk which followed Barnard's speech, to put Howell forward, as an honest man, a committee-man who thoroughly believed in the cause, and had much influence with the people ; but before he could be made to rise, a vehement fellow stepped before him, and dashed headlong

into the argument. His speech was hotly spiced, and fierce in denunciation of all who differed from him. He told the men that they were slaves, and their masters slave-drivers, who took the bread out of their mouths to spend it in folly and wickedness, in pony carriages and banqueting; the Union was the only thing to terrify them into decent justice. He did n't care whether they could sell or no at the present time, they had made enough in the past to enable them to fork out now. It was nothing but greed which prevented their giving the higher wage to men who wanted it and had earned it by their work, and have it they would, or all the furnace fires in England should go out.

Howell's turn came at last, but he rose reluctantly and with hesitation; the caricature of his arguments and his facts was difficult to bear, and more difficult to set right, and his speech fell comparatively flat on his excited audience. "He 's but a half-and-half un, after all," said many, in a grumbling tone; "why don't he go for one side or the other, like a man, and pitch into the owners and all?" "Wages," he said, "had not advanced in the past in the same ratio as the increase of the prices of coal and iron had done, which had been almost all for the benefit of the masters, and they ought not, therefore, to be lowered when bad times came in trade. If the masters had only been reasonable, all would have gone well; the men would have known exactly how matters really stood, and what fall was really required. Why would n't they show their books to the delegates if all was so straightforward as they said? They had offered, it was true, to show them to the men, but they knew that the men could not judge of such things by themselves alone; to understand the intricate ins and outs of balance sheets and trade lists was hard enough; it was not everyone who was fit to go to the front for a difficult job like this, all in a hurry, too, in this fashion. They must get the best men they could to do their work for them, whether they called them delegates or no. If

we 're ever to have arbitration, and it 's arbitration we 're fighting for, not only the keeping up wages a shilling or two, it 's only by the Union that we can ever get it, so that we may know where we stand and how we 're treated. Arbitration is a thing that a bad master hates like poison, letting in the light where he does not want things to be seen; but a good one is never afraid of it; no hocus-pocus for him about good years not more than paying for bad! But those who want arbitration must be on equal terms, or there 'll be no justice. Did ever you hear of a master arbitrating with his slaves? If one master has fifty thousand men behind his back, and another but five hundred, there would n't be much chance of an argument coming out straight and fair betwixt 'em. It 's only a Union which will set us on equal terms with the masters, and when we get it, arbitration will mean that our wages shan't be changed without our knowing the reason why. The masters have got money, and brains, too, to start with (though they might take a few hints sometimes how to manage both for the best). Now without the Union we can't get the command of money, and the brains we 've got are not much use, scattered up and down in holes and corners. So I say, stick to the Union, bind yourselves together, and your present loss will be the gain of you and your children after you, for the masters are well nigh driven to the last extremity already! It is n't much honour nor glory now, I can tell you, in being a committee-man, and it does n't make it more pleasant to see a child hungry, or a woman cry for want and sorrow, but if my words were the last I ever should speak, they 'd still be the same to you all—stick together, and stand firm, show yourselves men of the right sort, and we shall win triumphantly yet!"

The wavering spirit of the people was stayed, but they left the place without coming to any definite result; there was a great deal of confused talking, a tumultuous swaying of the bodies and minds of the great gathering for a little time longer, and then the meeting separated. The delegate

could hardly be said to have gained a victory, but neither, however, had he been defeated. As he followed the excited stream of people out into the sharp wintry night, with no smoke from the silent furnaces to veil the light of the stars shining coldly down on the passionate, seething crowd that filled the black streets, and followed the dim roads under the rubbish piles, he rubbed his hands and laughed to his companion, "We shall win yet!"

"Win what, and for whom?" muttered Barnard to himself, who was walking just behind him in the darkness.

CHAPTER XVII.

NEWS OF THE ABSENT.

"Have ye heard that Cilian is gone off somewhere with Mr. Evan, and nobody can't tell where," cried Barnard in a furious tone, rushing into the Howells' cottage on the following day in a violent state of indignation. Choicy was looking after the needs of her own and her adopted baby, one in her arms and one in the cradle, with great difficulty and no help, for Ivør had been sent out to a small place where he could eke out the scanty resources of the family by the little wage which he conscientiously brought to his mother.

"I don't believe a word of it!" answered Choicy, flushing up angrily, "how dare you ever say such a thing about her, and she away, as she told us, to a place for learning millinering."

"They believe it fast enough down at Plas Dhu, and no mistake, for I shall hear tell how angry Mr. Lancaster shall be, and your grandmother up at Bodavon thinks it's true, for I've been up to see how it all were, and what they shall have heard and knew, before I came to you," said Barnard sullenly, but a little mollified at finding that Choicy had at

least been as much in the dark about the dismal story as himself. "And if you shall put things and things together a bit," he went on, "you shall be of the same mind yourself surely. Where shall Cilian have been all this time since she left Mrs. Randolph? And never told a word about the new home, nor who she shall be with, nor how she likes it, for I asked you, and for all and about, and she shall have written once and again too! You told me so, and yet seemed to tell nothing!"

Choicy trembled; she had in truth been much annoyed by the sort of mystery with which Cilian had chosen to surround herself since she had left Bodavon. Her trusting spirit had always tried to believe that there was good reason for it, and that the girl was avoiding Evan or Barnard, or perhaps both, by her move. She had written of her present home as temporary, and had desired to be addressed at the post office of some little town. Letters were a dear luxury in those days, and their absence was thought little of in Cilian's unlettered class. There was nothing very unwonted in the delay, or strange in her epistles being short and telling nothing definite concerning her present life and occupations, for she was not used to writing and did not like it.

But Choicy's misgivings, once raised, as to her sister's fate grew almost too painful for her to bear, while she felt herself utterly powerless to do anything to rescue her. She wrote the most passionate appeals she could devise to the only direction she possessed, entreating Cilian to return, or to write word that they were married. She received no answer whatever, and she felt that probably the only effect of her letters had been to drive away the two to some more out-of-the-way place of concealment.

Still, however, when she heard of Mr. Lancaster's furious onslaughts on his son from Barnard, who kept himself carefully informed of all that could most bitterly pain him, there seemed to her a possibly good reason for the silence.

"Surely, even if they were married, they could not let on that it was all right, and his father so fierce against it," said she, in reply to the young man's interminable discussions and surmises.

Barnard hesitated, "And a pretty husband he shall make to be ashamed of such a one as her! when it should be such a pride as never were to him to have won her, as other folk shall have think, what would have given their right hand for to stand in his shoes!" groaned the poor fellow, dismally, as he prepared to leave the house. "You know, I suppose," he went on, "how nothing (to speak of) came of last night's meeting, and Bill Howell as strong for to hold out yet as ever! I think he 's just taken leave of his five senses, that 's what I think, and you half starved, and all of us driven as we are! And what we 're waiting for Heaven only knows."

"I won't have you talking like that of him that 's twenty times better than you, Barnard, and you know it, too!" said Choicy, firing up the more because she could not help agreeing with him in her heart, if not heartily, as to the present prospect of the strike—but, womanlike, she stood up the more for her husband now that he was on the failing side.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A FAIR OFFER.

THE explosion at Plas Dhu, when the news concerning Evan arrived, had been terrible. Mr. Lancaster had summoned his son home with threats of total disinheritance, but had received no answer. The passage at arms with Harold had aggravated the father past all patience, and he was almost frantic at this, the second, infringement of his projects for his sons.

"I married a lady myself, and my sons shall marry ladies too, or the devil a penny they shall have from me. It 's the only thing Evan can do now to help us, when he 's all his life been striving to pull us down, to marry as he ought to do, and as he could do, and redeem the property and all, when we 're in such straits as now. I believe he might have one of those Horwood girls even now, and they 'll have fortunes, every one of 'em."

The more shaky the edifice of his prosperity had become, the more firmly he set his mind upon his sons, and particularly Evan, remedying the state of affairs by a good marriage.

"I 'll cut him off with sixpence ; not a farthing of my money shall ever go to him if he marries this girl," repeated he, furiously.

Evan gave no sign, they could not even tell whether he had received his father's letters, for he never returned to Bodavon after the rumour that Cilian and he were together had come out. The tone of his home letters was not likely to bring him back, and the stormy communications between father and son had not the smallest effect on either. Evan was evidently, as usual, determined to have his own way. Mr. Lancaster stormed on, and, in spite of his wife's entreaties, the breach between them grew wider and wider as the son refused to return or to make any promise for the future. His mother heard from him occasionally, but it was only through her that he had any means whatever of living, and he could not afford to cut off his last anchor.

The news of his disappearance fell like a thunderbolt on the family at the little hill farm.

"What shall you think, Essie!" cried Gwenny 'vach,' always the first to hear anything from the outside world, and bursting breathless into the dairy where her sister was at work. "There 's your so grand Mr. Evan has gone off somewhere with that Cilian, who lived down with old Mrs. Randolph!"

"I don't believe it, however!" cried the girl, stepping

forward with heightened colour and shining eyes, ready to do battle for her friend when his fair fame required a defender.

"Well, you shall believe it or no," said her sister remorselessly, "but it shall be true all the same, and there is Mrs. Randolph, she is quite mad angry for to hear it even spoken of, and they shall be all the same down at Kefn Glas!"

"Then you shall see that it is all right, and he has done rightly by her, and they is married. I will not believe in no other thing that he has done by her, and he has the rights so to please himself," said Evan's little champion, bravely. Her hero-worship was strong and could bear any amount of discouraging rumours, but the blow fell heavily on her. The poor child had no expectations of any return of her unacknowledged feeling for Evan, or any possible result from her interest in him, yet it was no less a very sorrowful moment to her little loving heart to find that the place in his affections was occupied by someone else. She had too humble an opinion of herself to imagine that she could be of any importance to him, but yet it had been pleasant to believe that no one else had yet occupied that, to her, sacred shrine, or received the rich treasure, as she thought it, of his love.

Yet matters had changed a good deal at Brynfelyn for Llewelyn's daughters, during the last few weeks, as is not uncommon in such counties, rich in underground wealth. A couple of men had been seen busy with different weird instruments up and down the hillsides and deep valleys of the little farm; Llewelyn was backward and forward with them all day, and more and more preoccupied and silent as the surveying went on, and the boring and examination of rocks and strata proceeded.

Gweny watched the processes with extreme curiosity, not daring to enquire of her father or her grandmother concerning them. "Whatever shall all that poking and burrowing and squinting along a stick mean, I can't think."

said she to her sister in a puzzled tone, "and granny won't so much as open her lips, nor tell me nothing what they can be after, these many days."

"It shall not concern us at all," answered Essie indifferently, "'cept that father says we must get some so good supper for that ugly man. Shall you go for the plums that we may make a tart, or will you see to the crumpochs? Surely he eat up the cream last night as if they shall never see such things where he lives, poor things!"

The mining agent appeared at last as the sun went down, with considerable importance in his manner, and big words in his mouth.

"There can be no doubt that the seam dips here under the hill and joins the one in the valley. There 's both iron and coal on your property, Mrs. Brynfelyn, but it 's so deep down that it will hardly pay to work in such times as these. We 're willing, however, to make you a fair offer, if you please to part with the property. A *fair* offer I say; we should have to spend so much before we win anything, that it can't be much. We must take our chance, take our chance. Something, I have no doubt (giving time), will come out of it," he said, with a beautiful assumption of candour, "and you 'd have the advantage of money down."

The old woman looked at him shrewdly with her keen blue eyes. "It 's very kind to want to take all that so great risk on yourselves, and to let us have the so good money down," said she, "but we do not want to part with the land, very long in the family, from generation to generation, and I do think we will take a chance of your winnings, and share by a rent, perhaps, and a royalty, as my son shall say to you and settle, or not undertake the bargain at all. We do not want for money; if it do come it shall be welcome, and if not we are but where we were, which is not so bad a way of life neither."

"At your age, Mrs. Brynfelyn, I should have thought the immediate profit was far better; it may be years and years before anything is made out of the pits, and where

will you be then?" said the agent, a little too eagerly. "You might live on in this place, all the same, while the work 's going on."

"I have lived without the money here now for eighty-eight years," laughed the old woman, "it is not very much hurt to me to keep as we do be for a few years longer, and if I shall be gone, the so very young ones will have their turn when the good time comes, poor things! It shall not, perhaps, do them so much good neither." She still regarded her son as little more than a boy, and her granddaughters as babies. No amount of cajoling could make her budge a hair's breadth in her resolution, and the agent was obliged to go without making his bargain, much to his disgust.

"I will return," he said with dignity, "but I cannot flatter you with hope of better terms."

"So be it," replied old Gwenny, "we can wait till you do."

After this discovery, cousin Morgan's invitations to the girls, always many and hospitable, increased in frequency. She was a good-natured woman, and it had been a pleasure to her to patronise the girls even when they were poor; she had a sharp eye, however, for the main chance, and Gwenny, in the full bloom of her heiress-ship to future coal and iron, was more welcome now in every sense. Essie she angled for in vain; the girl had no liking either for the place or the hostess, and after one visit had found that she preferred the quiet of her own little hilltop.

"It 's a pity that all that nice money should go out of the family," Mrs. Morgan observed to her husband, "and why for? I 've always till this good time thought Gwenny a poor match for Thomas, and put my foot on it they should n't meet, but now I will send for him direct, and have the girl for to meet him, I 've none of my own to try for, and he is not much to look at, but he is a rare one to get on, and a tongue to wile birds from off the bushes anyhow."

Thomas was her husband's son by a first wife, to whom she had always been a good mother. In the universal ambition among the English middle class after a rise in life for their children, he had been articted to an attorney in a neighbouring town, instead of following his father's honest trade of butchering.

Mr. Thomas did not let the grass grow under his feet, and arrived just in time to welcome Gwenny as she set foot in the house. Mrs. Morgan had driven herself over in a gig to Brynfelyn to bring the girl back, and as they passed up the dismal black street of Kefn Glas, they saw Harold's back, far ahead, sauntering sadly along, on his way to nowhere.

"Hold up your head, Gwenny!" cried Mrs. Morgan hurriedly; "I would not let him think, if I was you, that you was pining for the sake of any such as Mr. Harold, and you an heiress now what might marry almost anybody, so to speak! Things is altogether changed betwixt you and he; and why has he not been to see you, if he is so keen as he should be?"

Gwenny did her best to follow the counsel, but her attempts at pride were useless, for Harold turned down a side street without seeing the gig or its occupants.

"It was n't much good, when he never so much as looked my way!" whimpered the girl, looking after him rather dolefully. "I wonder whether he 'll try to see me, if he hears I 'm come. I should like it very much; it is weeks now since he came to Brynfelyn, when granny sent him away because his father would n't give no consent at all to our wedding."

This was too dangerous a state of mind for Mrs. Morgan to risk any meeting between the two, and when that afternoon Harold, having heard of Gwenny's arrival, sounded the brass knocker which shone majestically on Mrs. Morgan's green door, that lady reconnoitred keenly through the window, and having seen that Gwenny was safely seated in the back parlour, listening to Thomas's delightful discourse,

she presented herself in an open space only just wide enough for her own portly person, and said, with becoming dignity, that "Miss Llewelyn, I'm sorry to say, is unfortunately engaged! I has directions from her grandmother and her father, too, for so to say."

"Harold opened his eyes; he was not used to be turned back from any door in Kefn Glas, but with a newborn humility as to his own claims, he did not like to thrust himself in if Llewelyn had given orders that he should not be received. He even got on so far as to feel that there might be reasonable objections to his suit in present circumstances, and turned sadly back to his father's house.

CHAPTER XIX.

JARS AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS.

CILIAN had grown very weary of the little lodging in the great town where she and Evan had taken refuge as their best place of concealment. It was very tiresome she found to be what she considered a lady, with nothing to do but what seemed to be lessons in her eyes, the reading and writing, the attempts at French and music, the trials after education which she had made at Evan's urgent request, and which "worried her to death," more than any amount of cottage work at Kefn Glas, or attendance on old Mrs. Randolph at Bodavon. In their present life she had not even any small household cares to distract her thoughts; they had no home, only a couple of rooms in some poor house, which was all they could now afford—a mere accidental perch, from which they might be driven any day if their steps should be traced. Evan was much away from her, and she longed after country sights and sounds, to get out of the reach of streets and houses for change, at least, of some sort. There was a small fishing village on the Welsh side of the Channel which she heard talked of, and where

she set her mind upon going. The opposite coast would have been safer as far as discovery was concerned, but she longed for the sound of her own Welsh tongue, and begged hard for her own old country.

It was hardly yet the fashion for the whole population to move away from home once in the year at least, but a few lodgings were let in a quiet out of the way corner in one of the many small coves with which the coast was indented, and there were beautiful views of the sea and rocks through a little grove of shaggy trees which came down to the water in the sheltered spot; but Cilian had little pleasure in anything. A letter from Choicy had reached her, forwarded from post-office to post-office, which made her wretched, enquiring what they were doing, where they were, and above all whether they were married.

"Why should n't you let me tell them that it 's all right, Evan?" repeated she, as he took her their first walk under the trees. "It do make me so wretched for Choicy to think so bad of me, and my grandmother. and Mrs. Randolph, and all the folks at Bodavon. Do let me write to them that you're really married to me."

"Yes, it 's all very pretty, but I don't care for it to be known to them all," answered Evan, dropping her arm and hitting at the tall nettles with his stick.

"I might tell them not to tell anybody at all."

"I told you before, Cilian, that my father threatens he won't leave me sixpence of the property if I married you! Why can't you be quiet, dear? My mother will bring him round, I should n't wonder, when once the troubles are over and the strike 's settled. Why should you risk all for nothing, just because you 're in such a hurry for people to think well of you?"

"But Choicy will just be breaking her heart about me, I know she is," urged Cilian, more and more earnestly. She did not believe in the termination of the strike making any difference; on the contrary, it seemed to her as if matters might only become worse.

"One 's just as bad as all, it 's sure to ooze out if anybody knows," answered he, shrugging his shoulders.

"But what does it signify so much about your father," persisted she, "we could live without his leave somehow, surely?"

"What does it signify? Why that they 'd cut off the little we do get as it is, and I can't do anything to keep myself, much less you!" answered Evan testily, "and I don't want you to work for your bread. You dearly love being a lady, you know that just as well as I do; why, you told me so yourself!"

Cilian winced; it was true that she by no means liked to descend in dignity after having tasted of the sweets of the upper ground, alloyed though they had hitherto been to her by the surreptitious nature of her position. Though she sometimes longed for the freedom of the far easier life of the past, she believed that all would be well when things got all right and above board. It was, however, not the love of promotion or position, as Evan sometimes suspected, but the best and highest part of her which longed for recognition as his wife, and since the last news from home, poor Cilian's cry now returned perpetually, thoroughly as she still believed in his word.

Tenderly as he loved her, it began to torment him sorely, and also, if the truth were told, to bore him not a little. They parted rather angrily; but a week or two after, when he thought of her all alone in the little seaside lodging, eating out her passionate heart, with nothing to divert her mind from her trouble, and not a single friend within reach, he returned once more, though at considerable risk of his whereabouts being discovered, as he believed. He had besides given up a pleasant visit to a friend whom he had met at the Horwoods, which he would have enjoyed exceedingly. He felt complacently how exceedingly kind and virtuous and self-denying he was, and when he was greeted once more by the ever repeated cry, "I can't bear that they should not know—it 's very unkind, why will you not let me

write, Evan?" it worried him, and in spite of his sweet temper he grew irritated by her persistency.

He was so fond of her, she was such a grand creature to look at, she loved him so passionately, she had taken such pains to learn what he wished, and to look and behave and dress as he desired, to prepare herself for the position which he wanted her one day to fill, and which she herself so longed after; and here she was risking everything in her impatience to be recognised! Why could not she be content with his affection, and his having shown it by *almost* marrying her? Her other friends might wait a little. Her duty now was to him.

He began to feel himself a very ill-used man, who had made all sorts of sacrifices for his love, giving up the chance of marrying a rich wife, so as to please his father, and reinstate himself in comfort and ease; while she, for whose sake he had renounced so much, was the person to be always openly or tacitly reproaching him. There was, however, something in poor Cilian's clinging to her good name with her friends, as the most precious thing she had in life, excepting always, as he knew only too well, himself, which he could not help knowing to be a real grievance, and it galled him to be continually reminded of it.

He had intended to remain with her for two or three days, but as she grew gloomier and more silent, and he knew that he did not intend to yield, the easy pain-hating side of him dreaded a further contest, and he began to think eagerly of the little trip which he had given up so meritoriously, and to consider whether he could not reward resolution, and still accomplish it.

"I think I will go along with Annesley after all, and come back here afterwards," said he. "I've always wanted to see a hunt on Exmoor, and he offered to mount me and take me to Torquay for the hunt balls afterwards. I've no money to play with now, and I must take my pleasure where I can get it. He said, 'If I changed my mind and got my business done,' for I told him I'd got business, and he

laughed, 'I might join him at Exeter still.' I should n't be away more than seven or eight days, or perhaps ten at furthest, and it seems a pity to lose such a chance; I may n't have such another for years, and I could get over to Ilfracombe from here quite easily."

"I thought you would have stopped a little with me," said Cilian, with her eyes full of tears, and with quivering lips. "How few months it is since first I saw you, up at the Castella that evening I was after the cowslips."

"What a time ago it seems!" muttered Evan, half to himself, with a sort of sigh.

"Yes, I'm afraid I ayn't as much to you now as then," she answered, half anxiously, half suspiciously.

"I would n't undo our meeting there, if that 's what you mean," replied he; but Cilian's jealous ears were not satisfied by the heartiness of his tone, and she turned away and burst into tears.

She was in an impossible position for her impulsive nature, a wife, but with hardly any of the privileges or rights of a wife, holding him by a single thread, which might snap if she drew it too tightly, and yet driven by her very love for him to be incessantly trying its strength and feeling after its nature.

"I wish you would n't, Cilian! You know I hate crying," cried Evan, much annoyed. "Here I come to you as often as I can get away without publishing everything to everybody, and you receive me as if I were nothing but a plague and a sorrow to you, and as if I was behaving very ill into the bargain, when I'm trying to do all I possibly can to please you! I think I will go down and see if I can get old Thomas to take me across the Channel in the fishing cutter; there's no other way of getting across in time, and nothing else in the port to-night, I see. I can handle a boat myself as well as most men, and there's nothing so jolly," he said, as he left the room hurriedly.

By the time he returned, having settled everything for

his next day's sail with the old fisherman, Cilian had made a great effort over herself, and the rest of the evening passed away quietly enough between them. But it was a hollow truce; the two undisciplined wills were drifting farther and farther apart; at best, her passionate, tender, concentrated, untamed nature, and his self-indulgent, easy, spoiled, kindhearted character must always jar more or less. They could hardly be expected to see such matters as they were now debating from the same point of view, or stand the continual friction of the circumstances they had put themselves into, without painful recriminations.

The next morning was fine for the time of year, with no wind, the sea very still and glittering in the sunshine, with a pale blue sky overhead.

"You 'll scarce get across all day, and you will be too late for Mr. Annesley," said Cilian, half sadly, half sullenly.

"There will be much more wind out at sea, and anything 's better than this dull hole," replied Evan, and then he caught himself up; he certainly did not wish to put his wife out of conceit with the place when he was about once more to leave her there alone.

"It *is* a dull hole!" said Cilian, significantly.

"I 'm sure I only chose the place because you 'd taken such a fancy to the coast!" answered he, in an annoyed tone.

"So I did—with you," answered the poor girl, unable to see how her harping on one string as she did vexed and alienated him.

"There 's old Thomas come at last!" cried Evan, joyfully, as the small cutter came out of the port with both her sails set, but lazily flapping in the windless calm, and drew as near as she could to a heap of stones which took the place of a pier.

"Good-bye, dear; I shall be most likely back on Monday or Tuesday week—Wednesday at the very furthest; take care of yourself!" and he kissed her affectionately, but evidently in a great hurry to be off.

She scarcely replied. Her heart was hot and bitter within her; but she followed the boy who was wheeling down a barrow containing Evan's luggage, and stood watching all the little bustle of getting the owner and his goods on board, with a stern, cold countenance. A boiling, passionate, internal struggle was going on, but she gave no outward sign of it, and did not utter a word. As the boat drew slowly away from under the shelter of the land, she waved her hand once in reply to her husband's repeated signals, but it was in the same dry unmoved way.

Presently, as the vessel drifted from the shore, she climbed up the rocks to a higher and still higher spot where she could watch its progress. As Evan had predicted, there was much more wind when they got farther into the Channel; the sail bellied out, and Evan sat in the stern holding the jib in his hand, as they tacked to and fro to take advantage of the little breeze. The haze grew darker as it rose higher into the zenith; the air grew almost close where she sat under the rocks; and still she sat on, keeping the little sail in sight—"it seemed like company," she said to herself.

The dull coppery look of the sky grew darker, and there was a sudden thunderclap and some large drops of rain; she turned her head aside for a moment, blinded by the glare of the lightning, and when she looked again she could no longer distinguish the boat amidst the cloudy confusion of sea and sky.

Then came a tremendous downpour of rain and hail, and she was drenched to the skin before she could reach the house. The wind rose, and blew an uncertain fitful gale, whirling the bits of straw and grass round and round, rising and falling again; it was like a tornado on a small scale, short and violent, blotting out all distant view, as if a dark curtain had been let down over the scene.

A short half-hour before, the sea had been crowded with vessels, passing up and down the Channel in the quiet morning, but they had almost all disappeared; some had

run for shelter to the nearest port, some had made for the open sea ; the white sails had been taken in upon those few which remained in sight.

"It is a bad thing when the wind shall rise like that, and chops and changes so that the people on board shall not know which way they shall turn the little ships," said the rough servant maid of all work of the lodging house, who had come in with Cilian's solitary dinner.

A vague dread beset her, and she could not eat, and when the weather calmed once more almost as suddenly as it had overclouded, she went down to the little port, where the December sun was again shining from under the dark clouds upon the small vessels dragged up on the beach, the coils of rope, the red buoy, and the children playing at being wrecked in the muddy pools.

"It is not a nice puff of wind that," said the old weather-beaten sailor to whom she appealed, "and the current in the Channel is very strong and nasty by times, specially when the tide turns."

Presently she met a woman with some dinner in a basin, and a child in her arms, whom she knew to be related to the owner of the fishing boat.

"Old Thomas knows what he is after better than most, and when he's sailing his own boat, too," said she, trying to reassure herself.

"Old Thomas he shall not go," answered the woman ; "he was not so very well with the rheumatics in the night, and his grandson he did send instead ; he is a good boy, and knows what he is after, shall young Griffith, almost as well as his grandfather !"

"How old is he ?" enquired Cilian anxiously.

"He shall be in his nineteen, maybe."

Her heart sank within her. She did not believe in Evan's boasted seamanship, and to have only a boy with him to manage the sails in such difficult navigation and risky weather was a frightful additional danger in her eyes.

She could not rest, and wandered up and down the rocks

and the solitary little esplanade. It was too late in the year for visitors, and she had the place all to herself. The wind had risen again, and the showers came down hard and sharp. It was a cold, bleak afternoon, and she was wet for the second time, weary, and sick at heart when evening came and no tidings of any kind had been heard of the fate of the cutter, or, indeed, she remembered sadly, were likely to be heard that night.

The little maid came out of the house at last, with a sort of kindly compassion, and fetched her in. "You shall kill yourself going on like this here, and you 've not yourself only to look to now," said she, significantly. "Mr. Evans, your husband, did tell you, you was to take care, for I heard him. There can be nothing more heard to-night. Indeed, how shall there be? The boat shall be got across to the Devonshire side, and you will be hearing in the morning when she comes back. You shall just go to bed quiet, and then you shall be ready when Mr. Evans, your husband, do send and write by Thomas pilot's boat."

Cilian laid down her weary limbs, but whenever she fell asleep visions of shipwrecked men roused her with a fearful dread; a horror beset her in the night season, an oppression which she could not shake off seemed to take away her breath; the walls of the room grew close and hemmed her in; her whole soul seemed to be listening and waiting in her dreary solitude; while the noise of the wind outside grew louder, and the gale increased almost to a hurricane.

CHAPTER XX.

CAPITULATION.

THE winter had arrived, and still the markets went on falling; the reduced price of iron and coal could be read for themselves in every trades' list, in every intelligence sheet. But the men had joined the larger Union, and could not now act for themselves unless they left it, and sacrificed

all their subscriptions. It had become evident, however, even to the most obstinate, that it was only a question of time. The inevitable end, which had been staring them in the face for so long, was coming nearer and nearer each day. More public meetings were held, more speeches were delivered; impassioned appeals were made on both sides, public opinion was swayed vehemently and uselessly to and fro, but as there is often a deeper conviction which grows up in men's minds independent of argument, a change in the opinion of the mass of mankind which takes place unconsciously, not in consequence of any particularly successful reasoning, but by simple advance of the stock of knowledge in the world, as the belief in fairies and witchcraft died away in one generation, and the possibility of making gold in another, so there came a time at Kefn Glas when the simple logic of facts became too strong, even for those who had hitherto refused to see them except through the medium of their own wishes, to hold out longer. The leaders at length made up their minds, with sore misgivings, to go to the manager and accept the terms offered at the masters' meeting. The deputation demanded an interview and came up to the works, which looked silent and woebegone, almost reproachfully it seemed to some of them, as they passed up through the usually busy yard, once full of men, and smoke, and fire, and noise, and bustle, now empty and bare.

Howell was the chief spokesman for Kefn Glas, and in a little more lofty tone than usual, hardly unnatural in one who had to capitulate after so hard a struggle, he announced that the men accepted the ten per cent. reduction required by the masters.

Mr. Thorne was a stern man, and it was more sharply and shortly even than usual that he spoke in return; his patience had given way at what he thought the utter unreason of the men in holding out so long after any real hope could have existed amongst them of any possible victory on their parts.

"You refused those terms," he said, "when they were offered weeks ago, and everything in the market has fallen since that time; iron has gone down in price, so has coal, you can see it for yourselves in every price list, in every trade circular. There's going to be a duty imposed abroad, shutting out one of our markets. We have had to refuse several orders, and customers once gone don't come back to the old line, but keep to their new friends, who've served them at a pinch. The machinery has deteriorated, the pits are beginning to fill with water, we have weeks to make up before we can earn anything at all. There must be a fresh fall of five per cent. now, for any work done. But even then you'll only be down to the old prices before the rise took place in the good times."

The men drew back. "We'll never consent to that," cried the deputation in chorus. "We won't take less than we've said, we'll go no lower."

The manager rose, his face was like flint—"You'll please yourselves, and nobody but yourselves, of course," he said bitterly, "only I give notice that if you don't come in by Monday, the rest of the furnaces will be put out, and you know how long it takes to light 'em again. You know, too, that I'm a man as keeps his word, and that's as true as that the river won't run uphill."

Howell muttered that they could say no more without consulting their fellows. Barnard attempted to speak, but was pulled back by his coat tails. "You'll only put your foot into it," whispered his friend warningly.

"And now don't let's have any more words about the matter. You'll let me know your decision," said Thorne, turning on his heel as he spoke, and the men left the room.

"I would n't yield, not if you gave me a hundred pounds down!" cried one man furiously.

"No, not if all the furnaces in South Wales were put out," said another.

Howell was silent; he knew that these were mere words, and that there was nothing left for them but to give way.

The men left the yard, sullen and depressed at the result of the meeting which they had hoped would settle everything ; but obstinately determined to yield no further, they retired to their own place of meeting. And when Howell at last spoke and advised surrender, with nothing but an empty exchequer to support them and no hope of help from within or without, he was met with cries of "Traitor !" "Bought over !" "You did n't say so last week," from one and another. Every defeat, every change of opinion, even on the strongest grounds or evidence, appear to a mob, as was the case in the French and German war, to be caused by treachery, not conviction.

After doing his best to explain, without making the smallest impression, or producing the least effect upon the clamour and storm of dissatisfaction and rage, he left the shed, saddened and hopelessly depressed. If he had helped to lead them wrong he suffered now acutely for his mistake. It was not only the dismal end which he saw was inevitable that half broke his heart, but the manner in which the struggle was closing. His pure visions of universal philanthropy, regulated on the strictest trades' union principles, with high wages permanently for every workman, hardly fluctuating with the markets, had been wrecked. The arbitrator chosen by themselves had decided against them, and the men had refused to abide by his decision as soon as it went contrary to their wishes. A qualm as to the possibility of success in the conditions and with the materials he had had to use, and the consequent wisdom of their long struggle, came over poor Howell's mind as he went slowly and sadly home, and sat down by his now empty, cold fireside, with his head in his hands, thinking over all that had passed.

Choicy, when she saw his mute distress, at first left him unquestioned, and with the truest sympathy moved silently about her work. She had plenty on her hands ; the once comfortable house was almost stripped ; they were terribly pinched for food ; their small savings had been eaten up ;

the winter store of potatoes was nearly finished. If it had not been for Ivor's help, who now worked in an old lady's household not far off, where he had his food, and sent back his small wages religiously to his mother, who washed and mended for him, they would have been almost starved. To add to her sorrow, she had not milk enough for her two babies; Rosannah's child was sickly and fretful, and though she did more for it, and almost, if possible, more tenderly than for her own little Cilian, it seemed to be sinking fast in spite of all her care. It was now wailing wearily; she feared it would disturb her husband, and carried it into the inner room, and lulled it off before she came back to him. Want of space is a grievous addition to the sorrow and discomfort of sickness in a cottage. When she returned she found him in the same posture, and laid her hand sadly on his shoulder, 'almost frightened at his immobility.

"Will you not speak, William? It do be best to let grief out. Sorrow shall be halved when there is two to bear it," said she, tearfully. "I do know that you have done all for the best you could for these folk that shout at you now, and God knows it, too, that 's one comfort, whatever man do think of you."

He lifted up his head. "If I 've been mistook, He knows it shall not be for want of striving after the right, and thinking all my brains were able to find it out; but ~~it~~ may be that I have not seen all the sides so clear as I should have done. Some of 'em say that we should not now make good the wages we 've lost, even if we 'd won," he mused. He would never have allowed this to an opponent, but Choicy was no arguer; he was quite safe from having his uncrystalised convictions thrown back at his head as missiles on some future occasion. She never made her own right another's wrong.

Discredited and disheartened, Howell gave up for a time attending the debates of the Union, and at length when their hopes, their credit, and their funds were all

utterly exhausted, the men gave way, and it was announced authoritatively throughout the foundries that the strike had come to an end, and that they were to return to work as soon as possible on the terms offered by the masters of the district.

There was an explosion of joy all through the valleys ; women were crying, children were shouting, men were shaking hands at the prospect of relief, some perhaps with a view to the beer of the future, but most from pleasure in resuming work, and for the sake of their families. Bands went up and down the streets of the different towns and villages, playing half through the night. It was in the earlier days of strikes when such things were a novelty.

The whole place at Kefn Glas was in an uproar of delight except in the Plas. Poor Mrs. Lancaster lay awake listening to the noise and bustle, but did not understand what the change might portend to herself and her family, for her husband had told her nothing. As his affairs grew worse and worse his temper had become almost past endurance, and it seemed impossible to him to give himself the relief of confiding in anyone.

"I 'm thankful it 's all over at last," she ventured to say, meekly, at breakfast, where she scarcely dared to ask for bread or butter except in a whisper.

"What good will it do to me?" shouted he, furiously. "Are you fool enough to think we can get any help from *that*, as things stand now?"

She felt like a hunted hare ; even complete silence did not give her immunity from his outbreaks of wrath. She began to suspect that there must be more mischief behind than she was aware of, and it was almost a relief to the strain, which was fast becoming unbearable to her, when, before the week was out, Mr. Lancaster was declared bankrupt—when the blow had fallen, and the truth was out.

The end of the strike was no use to him in the present state of his affairs, scarcely of any interest. "Too late, too late!" he muttered. "Why did n't they do it before,

if they meant to do it now? Return to work! Why, there's no work for them to return to! The fools! Do they think that work 's to grow up like grass under their feet as soon as they want it, and orders to come in like chickens when they 're called for. Horwoods may pick up again, but we 're done for at Kefn Glas—ruined, black ruined, we are!"

CHAPTER XXI.

"AUDI ALTERAM PARTEM."

THE Strike was over, but the troubles for Kefn Glas were only now beginning. It had been the letting out of the waters of strife upon the shaking edifice of Mr. Lancaster's prosperity during the past two years, which had been more than it could stand. He had been living from hand to mouth for many years, only just keeping his head above water, and his recklessly extravagant sons, the wasteful ways of his own house, his own want of knowledge of the higher branches of his trade, had all seriously injured his fortunes. If all had gone well, however, with his business, he might have weathered his difficulties, but beset as he had been within and without by troubles of all kinds, there could be no chance for him in the utter cessation of business caused by the strike. His fall entailed misery and almost starvation on all the families dependent upon the works at Kefn Glas. It was a tremendous and unexpected blow. The men had not anticipated the smash, and when the neighbouring furnaces in the adjacent valley once more began to smoke, and the silent ruin of their own works became more hopelessly apparent, Howell's heart sank within him.

One day he was slouching sadly up the hill on his road to a pit where he hoped to get work, however poorly paid,

in such times. He had just reached the top where the lonely moorland began, and silently, and with his head down, he walked on alone, when Mr. Thorne passed him on horseback at a smart trot. Howell looked after him with a mixed feeling of dislike and admiration for his generalship which he could not restrain. As he watched the fast diminishing figure, still in sight, a sheep leaped suddenly over the wall. The horse, a very fine one, took fright, shied violently and threw its rider, then turned and ran down hill towards home, but Howell was in the way, and caught the bridle as it passed him in the narrow road.

"I'm much obliged to you, Mr. Howell," said the manager, coming back and looking steadfastly at him, as he brushed the dust off his kness. "I should have been sorry to have had the beast hunted through Kefn Glas by the boys in their present temper. I never thought that you and I should come together again, after all has been said and done up here. But all 's over now, and settled; we shall never meet again, most likely, and I should like to have a few words with you, man to man, if you don't object."

Howell laughed a little grimly. "I, for one, certainly never thought we two should talk together anywhere or any wise. What is it you would want to say, man to man?"

"I wonder what you think you 've done for the men, Howell," said the manager, not unkindly; "I believe you were honestly struggling for their good, not like those delegates who get their bread by it."

"I did n't know enough to work a strike without wiser men than me to help to guide it," answered Howell sharply.

"You struggled here against a weak master, and have broken his back and your own, too," went on Thorne without minding him. "You strove against a prosperous, well-conducted firm like ours, and all you did was to enable us to give up spending for work which we were carrying on just to keep the men in wages, and tide them over (and ourselves too, in one sense) to a better time. It 's clear that in neither case have you done yourselves any good."

"We 've done you no harm, anyhow, if it 's true you 're glad to have had less production," retorted Howell.

"Well, we 've wasted money in having to restore machinery and buildings, which might have been spent in wages, but in great works where enormous capital is embarked, great fortunes are made by the mere fact of interest from money (put in, mind you, originally by the masters), which accumulates when trade is good, so that they can hold out in the bad times which must come in all concerns, sucking their own paws, as it were; but in the smaller works, like Kefn, money must be earned month by month to pay the outgoings, and the interest on the original expenditure, or borrowed capital perhaps, as it was here, which must be got as it 's paid, or it 's ruin to the concern. The owners risen from the ranks, the workmen who have invested their earnings, go first, therefore. The very men whom I should have thought you 'd have a feeling for."

"They 're the hardest masters always," muttered Howell, who, like other workmen, was very jealous of those who had risen from his own class.

"You 've lost, absolutely, the wages you might have earned these last months," went on Thorne. "Capital can wait without earning interest, and still remain capital, if the house is solvent, don't you see? But your loss can never be made good; for no advance you could get in the bounds of what 's possible could ever make up for the missing weeks of wage? If it is a legitimate rise you 'd reach it without a strike, in the common course of events; if it is a fictitious one, it must come down quickly, like the last rise here, and, meantime, the sale of the article is injured, which is made to cost more than it need do."

"Ah, but the rise would n't come so soon without the fear of a strike; no master will make it until he is compelled, and the only way of compelling him, is by the Union."

"When the good time for trade comes, wages. rise because no one can help it, and there is competition to get hold of the workmen," answered Thorne.

"And then as to our missing Lancasters! There 's other reasons why they 've come to a stop; they 're extravagant and wasteful, and the sons don't mind their business. It 's not the demands of the workmen that have done for them, anyhow," cried Howell eagerly.

"I 've had their affairs in my hands, and I believe that they could have won through. But even if you speak truth about them, you won't deny that it might happen in some cases, so we won't quarrel about individual instances. The interests of masters and men are bound up together indissolubly, that 's the important point; one suffers if the other does."

"The masters' profits are the product of the men's labour," said Howell "so they ought to share in them."

"Not more than the men's earnings are the product of the masters' capital (hang the mare, why won't she be quiet!)" said the manager, as the impatient beast nearly shook the bridle out of his hand. "I don't expect you to believe me, Howell. 'He that 's convinced against his will,' you know, and you 're not convinced; but you 're a thinking fellow, you care for the men—don't you see that a delegate can't much wish a strike to end? He 's a great man while it lasts, and well paid, while he 's little but a pricked bladder after it 's over. His occupation's gone; how can he help thinking it a fine thing for it to last, even if he 's honest? Why should you pin your faith on what such men say? I advise you to look yourself into the case on the other side a bit. Do you think the masters would risk what they do without a good deal of cause? I don't say they 're always right by any means; they make mistakes like other men; but they 've more education, more knowledge of what 's going on in the world, and so more chance of knowing what 's possible in production. And if you count the failures in trade as keenly as you do the

great fortunes that are made, you 'd see it 's not plain sailing for the heads of any large firms."

"Then let them share the profits, while they have them, with the men! Even you say they 're large sometimes."

"And what about the losses? Will you share them too? You must share both or neither; and I 've heard a workman say that pretty even wages were far better than great ups and downs. Besides, if wages were to rise in all trades—and if you want it for one you must of course logically demand it for all—don't you see that prices must rise all round too? So that the same money must buy less goods in the end for you men. You are consumers as well as producers. You always seem to forget that in your calculations, even if it were right each to consider the interests of his own handicraft alone. I must get on," said he, for his horse had become by this time almost impossible to hold, but as he mounted the troublesome beast once more, he held out his hand—"Well, good-bye, Howell, shake hands. I suppose you 're going off from these parts? There 'll be nothing doing now for months, perhaps years, at Kefn Glas, and you 'll hardly find work elsewhere just here, we 're all too full, and you 've been too honest a committee man," said he smiling.

Howell shook hands with him, his face working with contending emotions. "If you 'd talked to us a bit more as you 've done to-day, Mr. Thorne, there would not maybe have been so much bad blood betwixt us all in the back times, even if we could n't all have come to the same mind. There 's a lot of things as a man can read in another's face, bless you, as there 's no print in Christendom can show him!"

And the two chiefs of parties parted in peace, never to meet again in this world, but with a very different feeling towards each other, a respect for each other's motives, born of that personal intercourse which nothing can ever supply the place of in interpreting what otherwise remain dead words, or softening the idea that their opponents are con-

centrations of wickedness, which partizans of both sides will continue to hold until brought eye to eye with them in flesh and blood. Howell went forward on his solitary way in search of work, but his errand was fruitless, as Thorne had warned him; there was little business doing anywhere, and he was not likely to be the man chosen to do what still remained to be given out.

"There 's no work to be got at the Llanfair furnaces for us," said he in a depressed tone to his wife that evening when he entered his cottage, tired out with his long and useless walk.

"What ever shall we do?" replied Choicy sadly, "and the poor baby's dead since you went off in the morning," she added, with tears in her eyes.

He did not answer; it was impossible for him not to feel it a relief to have a mouth less to feed, even a baby's at such a time, but he would not hurt his wife by saying anything against her good deed.

"We shall have to go further afield to find work, and a good way, maybe, too, that 's certain," he began a few minutes after. "There 's nothing to be had nigh here. Mr. Thorne told me so, but he spoke kind and friendly to me, like a man, too, though him and me don't much agree neither, nor are n't likely so to do. But I 'm glad not to part in anger. He 'd have made a fine Union leader, he would!" was his climax of praise for his enemy.

"I shall be loth to go away," said Choicy with a sigh; "we 've had our joys and our bad times, too, together here, and there 'll never be any place like this for home to me, where we came when first we were married, Willy. But if the work 's gone there 's no help for it I suppose. You 'll have to go first to look at things surely, and then send for us. I wonder if we could get anywhere near where Cilian's gone to? I should n't not so much mind going there," and she sighed again more sadly still, as she thought how little she knew of her sister's whereabouts.

CHAPTER XXII.

RUMOURS.

THERE were no tidings whatever of the "Mary Jane" next day, only a rumour that several boats were believed to have been wrecked in the Channel during the sudden storm.

Cilian's distress had become almost intolerable, and to sit still and wait for news was impossible to her. She went down to old Thomas's cottage in the port, where the mother was grieving over the loss of her youngest and best beloved son. "He 's gone, he 's gone!" she repeated. "Three gone now—my husband and poor Owen coming home from Bombay; and his grandfather grown so bad with the rheumatics that he cannot go to sea half of his time," moaned the poor woman; "and whatever is it we 're to do I can't think for a living?"

"Let you and me go over to the other side, to Ilfracombe, where they was bound, and see if we could not make out something! We could find out more, surely, than them that does not care like us, and they may have been picked up by some passing ship which does not come back, and may yet send word," cried Cilian eagerly.

"There 's a boat going to Ilfracombe to-day. Keep up your hearts, they turns up sometimes alive after days and days out at sea!" was repeated to them right and left by old and young, compassionately, as they left the shore.

It was a melancholy expedition, in the cold and the wet, for mild as the weather is in those parts, winter is winter still. The narrow, intricate opening to the little harbour of Ilfracombe, between the masses of rugged sharp pointed rocks piled one above the other, is not pleasant sailing for small vessels in bad weather, as is shown by the little lighthouse on a point of rock, once a chapel to St. Nicholas, where prayers to that guardian saint of sailors had been put

up for ages by anxious wives and mothers. The tide was falling, and immense flocks of sea-birds were hovering over the fast appearing mud of the harbour, and dropping like leaves, stilly and gently, on whatever good fortune the wash of the town might bring to the winged waiters on luck. The forest of tall masts, of ropes and spars, the close packed hulls of the fishing vessels in the narrow space of the land-locked little harbour, overlooked with high cliffs and steep slopes ever towards the small town, was beautiful and strange, but Cilian saw nothing of them. The two poor women went up and down the rude wooden jetty, enquiring for the "Mary Jane," but no one had heard or seen anything of her.

At first, fearing to displease Evan by giving his own name, she enquired for him as "Mr. Evans," but as her anxiety grew greater, and she cared less for the risk of discovery, she asked for Mr. Lancaster, of Kefn Glas, and found much more attention paid to her questions, though some stared and some laughed.

"What, he du a got two names, du he?"

All that day and the next they sought up and down the neighbouring villages, but without the smallest success, and at length had to return with sore hearts and no tidings. Rumours that pieces of wreck had been thrown up at a fishing station down the coast reached poor Cilian, but when she went off to enquire there was nothing to show whence they came. Once a man was reported to have been picked up, but nothing more was heard of him. Other boats had certainly gone down, and her heart died within her. Her passionate nature had taken up one idea, and she was deaf and dumb to all else; she exaggerated her own shortcomings, especially on the last evening and morning she had spent with Evan. The recollection of her complaints, however justified, of her cold parting with one whom she loved so exclusively, seemed to sear her heart as with the touch of a red-hot iron.

"He would n't have gone that morning if I had n't

plagued him so," she repeated to herself. Her restless misery was only allayed by pacing continually along the seashore in the storms and wintry weather. "He shall not be lost, he shall not be lost," she muttered to herself. The local superstition was strong in her, of the misery of an unquiet grave for the dead, and she seemed more easy, or at least more occupied, when pursuing her dismal search, than in the dreadful silence of her little lodging.

At length, in her sore distress, she wrote home to enquire if any news of Evan had been received at Plas Dhu, and another two days were wasted before the slow post across the hills reached Kefn Glas.

Choicy was sorely perplexed by the message, which made her more anxious than ever. Cilian had entered into no details concerning herself, and in the uncertainty of her relations with Evan it was a most painful errand to ask for news of him from the Lancasters.

"They shall maybe think it a liberty of me to go and speer about him. What business is it of yours? they shall perhaps say," thought she, but she sent up Ivor to the big house.

Mrs. Lancaster, looking haggard and old, was just coming into her kitchen as the boy stood before Ianto's chair telling his tale, with Cattus by his side, questioning eagerly.

They both began anxiously at their mistress. "When had she heard from Mr. Evan last? Where shall he be? What was he doing when he wrote?"

"Why do you want to know in that sort of way?" enquired the poor mother, with alarmed eyes, at the sight of the strange meaning in their faces. "He was quite right when I heard last; it is not a week since he was staying with the Horwoods."

"And what was he for doing next? Did he say where he was for going?" said Cattus, in the same tone.

"He talked of going over to Devonshire for some hunting and a ball," replied Mrs. Lancaster.

"Here 's one from the village says there shall be fears about him," began his nurse, standing before Ivor, and trying to break the tidings a little on its stern course to her mistress.

"There 's been a boat wrecked in the Channel that he was aboard, and nothing heard of anybody nor thing," said the boy, bluntly, putting in his word. "What 's the use of wasting time like that there," thought he, looking straight up into the mother's face.

Mrs. Lancaster sat down in the nearest chair as if she had been shot.

"I must go in and tell the master, it 's fitting that he should know directly, if something may be done," said she, passionately, as soon as she recovered enough to be able to stand; and quite ignoring the presence of the boy, whom she had not connected in her mind with Evan, she left the room, much to Ivor's annoyance, without speaking to him.

"She might have just spoken to a chap," he murmured as he went away.

Mr. Lancaster was sitting gloomily by the dining-room fire, with a pile of newspapers beside him. He was looking over the account of the strike and its effects, which were being chewed and rechewed, dug into, and pounded to and fro, in a way which revolted his pride, and wrung all his good as well as his evil feelings. He was furious with the lies, as he called them, the careless ignorance and utter indifference of the writers, who greedily put down every rumour they could hear or invent, without caring a straw whether it were true or false, or whom they might damage, so long as they could fill the necessary inches of paper. If the worst came to the worst, the paragraphs would do to contradict next day, which was the next best thing to an original bit of news. He almost shook with rage as he read the misrepresentation of motives, the misstatements of facts, the absurd falsehoods, the voluntary mistakes, which abound at such a time; when suddenly his eye caught his own name in a small paragraph apart, and he read, with

dazed eyes, how a boat, in which it was believed was young Mr. Evan Lancaster, of Kefn Glas, accompanied only by a lad, had been wrecked five days before in the Channel; how nothing whatever had been heard of the vessel, which was known to have been caught in a sudden squall, and there could now be little doubt that both had perished.

He held out the paper to his wife as she entered, without speaking.

"John," she began, without looking or attending to it, in her preoccupation, "I've just heard that there ——"

"Read, read, I tell you!" cried he, furiously, his face red with excitement and pain, and with shaking hands that could hardly hold up the sheet.

She mechanically took the paper, and tried to see what he was pointing at so vehemently, but while she was striving to collect her senses so as to read it, there was a dull sound from the chair, and her husband had fallen in a fit of palsy, before she could reach him with help.

The strain had been too great, the struggle against fate had been more than his despotic temper could bear, when, on the back of his money troubles, came now the stroke of his more private grief. The son upon whom he had always built all his plans and hopes for the future, had gone before him, everything seemed to give way under him at once, and the crash was absolute.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SEARCH.

EVEN in the midst of her sore home distresses, Mrs. Lancaster's whole soul was bent upon obtaining more definite tidings of Evan. "He may have been picked up at sea; there are a thousand things possible; I *must* hear something. Go, Harold, go, dear, and find out about my child," she

entreated of her son, who stood by his father's bedside, looking on somewhat helplessly.

"I don't know where to go," muttered he. "It's a long coast line is the Channel."

"Go up and ask at that girl's relations, there in Kefn Glas. I've no doubt they know whereabout they've been, though we do not," she added bitterly. "At all events, they'll put you on the scent. Go, dear; don't delay, if you've any pity for me."

Harold, who was out of sorts, as well as out of spirits, since his fruitless visit to the outside of Mrs. Morgan's door, sauntered unwillingly, with his hands in his pockets, to the stables, and helped to get ready the only horse now left in them.

Meantime, Choicy had received a few more despairing words from poor Cilian, craving for the help which none could give. "Had nothing been heard at Plas Dhu of Evan? Would not the parents," she asked, "write to the parsons of the coast villages enquiring if anybody had been thrown up near them?"

"I *must* go to her, and she all so lonely eating out her heart," cried Choicy, with a repressed passion of affection in her tone which was more difficult to withstand than many louder demonstrations.

"I would look after the child myself if cousin Hughes would see to it bedtime and morning," said her husband dubiously. "It's well the other t' other poor little one is one," he added mentally. "But wherever is there money come from for you to get to that place? It shall cost more than you think for to go so far."

"There is just only to part with the old book with the things in it, that we've had so long in the family," she answered with a sigh. "Mr. Horwood sent word once and in that he would give money for it. I will take it over myself or send directly."

But there's neither coach nor carrier across country over the hills to that so out of the way place."

"Then I'll walk, and there'll be merciful folk will give me a ride here and there by times," she cried excitedly.

At that moment Harold, in his gig, stopped at the foot of the flight of stone steps, and called out without getting down—"I say, Howell, I'm going off to try to get news of my brother, Evan. Where was he last? I suppose you know." He spoke a little hardly till he saw a lowering expression in Howell's face, which would not bear trifling with.

"It's for my poor mother," he added apologetically. "Those coast villages are so difficult to get at, you know, that I must drive there anyhow, that's why I'm taking the gig."

Choicy turned pale. "I'm going myself," said she in her quiet tone; "take me with you, it shall be your shortest way for to find him wherever he is."

Harold hesitated for a moment; a stupid pride at being seen driving along with her by his side came over him.

"I know where Cilian is, for she wrote, and it's your best chance for Mr. Evan anyhow; she'll know more than anyone else can tell how he went off when he left her. Take me with you to her, as you value your hope of heaven," she cried earnestly.

He made room for her by his side, and ashamed of his first thought, did all he could for her comfort, as Howell packed her carefully in with her little bundle.

All that day they drove on, up narrow valleys, over miniature passes, where the bleak hilltops showed nothing but stones and heather, only to plunge again down fresh steep descents—a perpetual series of ups and downs, with glaring furnaces, surrounded with a circle of mixed vegetation and smoky coal works, everywhere encroaching on the beautiful face of nature. Sometimes they skirted a lovely mountain side clothed with wood, the great sycamores and old oaks looking as if they had been there ever since the mountain had been first rent asunder, the branches almost meeting over their heads; then came slopes of rolling

stones, so steep that even the heather and fern could hardly cling there, and narrow portals between rocks which seemed to stop all further passage. And everywhere, when they reached a summit, glorious views, dimmed by trails of far-reaching smoke over hills and valleys, ended in the bright sea line of the distant Channel.

They changed their horse more than once, taking with them a boy to ride back the tired beast. The way seemed endless to Choicy, little used to leaving home at any time. It was night, the early night of December, before they reached the neighbourhood of the fishing village whence Cilian had dated her letter. It had rained, and Choicy had scarcely felt it; it had grown fine, and she had hardly noticed it in the pre-occupation of her miserable anxiety.

The horse went slowly along the rough, stony by-roads overhung with bushes, which they were now threading, and her fever of impatience grew nearly intolerable; it seemed to her as if her sister's life almost hung on their arrival, and that the journey would never end.

"Can't you get on a little faster?" she said at last, as they felt their way along a narrow dark lane.

"We were almost down over that big stone as it was," answered Harold, a little sullenly. He was not used to sorrow, and it seemed to him against nature, a quite inconceivable piece of ill luck, that misfortune should fall upon him of all men; almost, indeed, a personal lapse of Providence in its duties to himself. What had *he* done that he should be brought into all this trouble? was the thought continually passing through his mind almost against his will. But he heard poor Choicy's deep, patient sigh, and her uncomplaining misery touched him. He was a kindly young fellow at heart, only its muscles had never been used, and hardly yet knew how to work.

He drew up the plaid over her knees. "You must be deadly cold," he said, "in this nasty, raw night; we can't be far off now from the place; you'll see we shall find them both all right soon."

Presently they saw the lights of a small fishing cove below them, and the black masts and hulls of the schooners in the port appeared against the brighter water of the Channel.

"How should I know where's Waterloo buildings?" cried the boy, half asleep at their feet, though stirred up by a kick from Harold at every turn, only to repose once more.

They crawled down the steep, stony road to a row of white lodging houses facing the shore, looking blank, and cold, and tenantless, where they knocked some time in vain.

"What can be come of Cilian?" sighed Choicy, sick with deferred hope.

At length the creaking door opened, and a blinking serving girl put her head out.

"We want to know about Mr. and Mrs. Evans, what was stopping here," cried Choicy eagerly.

"Yes, they was here surely, but there's doubts as he's drowned in the Channel; the boat's never turned up again since the storm on Thursday morning was a week," was the answer.

"And where is she? Is she here?" asked Choicy with a palpitating heart.

"She's been just mad for to find the body, and she's going about up and down, up and down, to see if it will turn up anywhere about. There came word this morning that a bit of wreck had been flung up in the night off 'Dead Man's Point,' and she were off by daylight for to see if he might n't be come in too, that's the wife did, poor thing," said the girl compassionately.

"Was she his wife?" enquired Harold, in a low voice.

"Well, 't were no business of mine, and I can't say," answered the woman; "anyhow she were a modest, nice-spoken lady, and wore a ring on her third finger, as I noticed often when he was n't here."

"That hardly looks like being a wife, if it was only then," muttered Harold.

"She would n't dare do it at all if she was n't married,"

replied Choicy, almost fiercely for her. "How far is it to 'Deadman's Point'?" she enquired after a moment.

"A matter of nine miles, and more, for you can scarce get past the boggy bit in this weather, and must go round by the lower way."

"I'll go on directly," declared Choicy. "Where can I get a horse d'ye think? I'm her sister, and she ought to have somebody with her, and she so overtaken and heavy laden with grief and trouble."

"You'd never think to start off to night! Why it's so dark by the sea road as you'd be over the cliffs in no time! And the way scarce more than a track in places," said the girl.

Choicy hesitated.

"Wait till morning; you cannot do no good to night, and just wear yourself clean out. You may be off by day-break, and I'll bring you to old Thomas what owned the cutter, and he can tell you a deal more nor me, how it all come to pass in the squall," the girl went on.

"Wait till morning," repeated Harold, "and I'll go with you down to the port. You can't get on to-night, that's clear, and what's not possible can't be," said he, oracularly.

With a sore heart Choicy gave way, and as soon as Harold's orders for dinner, endless as they seemed to her, came to a stop, she dragged him down to the fisherman's cottage on the shore.

Old Thomas was sitting mending a net, by a flaring fire of broken ship timber and coal mixed, in an enormous, dark cavernous fire place—the pale green and blue flame cast strange lights upon the old man's grizzled head and beard and his overhanging brows, and hawk eyes, while Rembrandt shadows filled the large low room, with its earthen floor shewing weird shapes where the coils of rope, torn sails, and broken anchors lay in heaps.

"Yea, the Mary Jane's gone down, and my lad in her too, God help him."

"But how about Mr. Lancaster," cried Choicy, "there was a passenger, wasn't there, aboard?"

"Yea, a passenger. Why did he make my lad goo with him that chancy day, when they did ought to have bided at home? And now the cutter's gone down, and how's ever I to get another, and me left alone, and none to help with the nets, and must pay for one to work for me? It do be very bad for us," he repeated.

There was nothing more to be got out of the old fisherman, but as they turned to go, a fearful face looked out from the dark recesses of the cavernous background of gloom, and to it Choicy appealed.

"It's me do be Morgan's mother, and a good lad he was to me; and it was me as went out with the gentleman's wife over to Ilfracombe, to seek tidings of the cutter, and could get no satisfaction. She's like wild for to find the body, and lay it quiet in the ground, and right too, for how shall ever they rest there, beaten up and down the sea? My master's gone too, but we didna find the corpse, and his uncle, and our biggest, four of 'em my boy makes as is drowned. I'd a gone with her to day, to seek them again, but I cannot leave father, he's a bit doited, he is. She've a been both ways the coast line up and down, but there's nothing known nor seen, and the currents is so strange in the Channel, there's no telling which way nor where they may drift a body, and this stormy weather as has set in makes it more chancy to guess wherever it's best for to seek for them poor fellows.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"THE EVIL THAT MEN DO LIVES AFTER THEM :

THE GOOD IS OFT INTERRED WITH THEIR BONES."

LITTLE sleep did Choicy have that night, and before daylight she was about again. It was with difficulty, however, that she could drag up Harold so early in the day.

"What 's the use of being in such a hurry?" said he, yawning; "we shan't hear more in one place than another. There 's as much chance of him turning up here as anywhere else."

"I must go to Cilian, anyhow," replied she restlessly, "she shan't be left a day longer than I can help; but you need n't come, I can go on alone."

The better part of Harold, however, prevailed, and the strange companions started on their dismal journey together once more. The cold salt breeze blew in their faces as they drove along the rough track; the mists were rising off the sea in the early, grey morning light, and the rocky headlands, which plunged steep into the sea, were deep in what looked like fleecy locks of wool up to their waists. The wind had lulled, but the waves were still dashing high on the rock-bound coast, driven in by the full force of the Atlantic up the Channel. As they crept along, past occasional black piles of peat collected from amongst the heather, the weather lifted, and the rough brown sweeps of moorland, ending in sheer precipices, came one after the other into sight. At length they reached the pitiless headland where long reefs of sharp, rugged, black rocks stood far out to sea, marked by white lines of dashing foam. Many a good ship had been driven helplessly on that fatal line of coast: "Dead Man's Point" had only too well earned its dreadful name by fearful tales of wrecked men, dashed to pieces on the edges of the serrated ledges, which rose like teeth out of the angry waves, and gave no quarter. The set of the current was towards the cliff, and small chance had any vessel of escape that got within its relentless sweep on a dark wintry night.

Beyond the point was an indentation in the land, hardly even to be called a bay, where a stream ran out from the hills behind, and a small collection of ugly stone white-washed one-storied huts, rather than cottages, were clustered together in the shelter of the hollow in the hills. Amongst the rest was the smallest of public houses, where

the hostess gave up to them her inner room with its clay floor and box bed. Here they found that Cilian had slept the night before.

"She 's somewhere on the beach," said the woman, "and has been all the afternoon yesterday, up and down, searching, she has."

Choicy hurried down to the shore, scrambling over the slippery seaweed, and climbing over the rocks, till she reached a point where she could see far down the line of coast fringed with foam, but there was no one in sight, and her heart sank within her. Presently, she came on a small shepherd boy watching a handful of sheep, which found their scanty living in and out of the heather bosses.

"Which way is the poor lady gone?" said he. "Down there," and he led the way to a small cove running inland, almost hidden under their feet. The mouth was narrow, and within its quiet retreat lay a little reach of white sand, a strange contrast to the rugged desolation of the rest of the shore. Rare foreign shells, found nowhere else in these latitudes, were drifted by some unknown current into this quiet haven, and deposited here uninjured by some still, underlying sea stream, coming from far away, and unaffected by all the stormy agitation of the upper waters.

At the mouth of the entrance, upon a jutting rock, stood Cilian, with her hand over her eyes, watching intently where the heaps of slippery weed had been flung up by the last night's tide. Her tall, upright form, with the folds of blue cloak round her, looked majestic in the morning light on the wild, lonely coast. She turned as her sister came near, but showed no surprise at the sight. The fixed look of the large, dark eyes in a perfectly colourless face, which seemed to see nothing near in their far-reaching intentness of search, the haggard expression of the mouth, had so changed the face that Choicy hardly recognised it. The havoc worked by the last eight days on the well known features had been great indeed.

"Come in, dear," said Choicy, weeping, "come and rest;

you 'll murder yourself this way, and not only yourself," she added, looking at her. "And you can do no good now to him that 's gone, half killing yourself this way."

"I was the death of Evan, I was," muttered the poor girl, "I was always worrying and plaguing him for to tell that we were married, and that day he would n't stand it no longer, and he went off in a boat, and was drowned there almost before my very eyes, only I did n't know it, watching on the shore. He 'd have stopped with me that day, if I 'd only let him alone, I know he would, but I was so cross, and angry, and hurt with him I was, and so cold at parting! I that would ha' given my very life for him! And now he 's gone, and I shall never see him here again, no more to tell him so."

"Then you are married?" cried Choicy quickly.

"Yes, I 've got the marriage lines," said Cilian abstractedly; then suddenly wringing her hands, she cried, "and there, he charged me not to tell! and I 've broke his word; I were bad to him living, and now I 'm bad to him dead."

"'T will do him no harm, only good, to tell now as he was n't so bad as he seemed," answered Choicy bitterly.

"He was n't bad; he promised all should be right, and none shall speak evil of his name. I 'm his wife, by rights, and now it is my duty not to let him be flung to and fro, up and down that restless sea, but lay the body quiet in his grave, for him to be still — and me too — and me too," repeated she, turning again, to her one object, which had taken such strong hold on her imagination as to leave room for nothing else.

"Come in, dearie, and rest a bit, with me that 's come all this way for to comfort, and be with thee," pleaded Choicy.

"To day 's the ninth day, and they says the bodies is often driven up on the ninth day, specially after such stormy weather, and I must be by to take him in when he shall come to me, and I know he 'll come, dead or alive, I know

he 'll come to me, that shall be waiting for him all these days," said Cilian with a conclusive shiver.

Choicy was at her wit's end how to win her away from the coast. At that moment, Harold appeared, scrambling down the steep face of the hill.

"She says she 's married!" cried Choicy, as soon as he came near enough to hear in the noise of the waves what was said. "Can 't you help me to get her back to the inn, for a bit, at least?"

Harold looked doubtfully from one to the other.

"I 'm Mr. Evan's true and lawful wife," said Cilian, with grave dignity; then seeing his still uncertain expression, "It 's not in the face of the dead as I should tell untruths, but you ought 'nt not to take my word: write to St. Peter's Church, Bristol, where we were wed."

"Was it in your right names?" asked Harold, anxiously.

"Mine was," answered she, "but I think he signed only Evan; he said it would n't signify; there was lots of people called in church, and he was 'fraid he should be found out."

"There was an awkward trial the other day," said Harold, hesitatingly, "where a marriage was declared void because the bridegroom gave only his Christian name. It was a particular little statute, the Judge said, if it was done on purpose."

He and Choicy looked at each other sadly. Had Evan been keeping this loop-hole open for himself if he found the marriage inconvenient?"

"I 'm very sorry, it was n't your fault, we must not punish you for it," cried the young fellow, the best part of him coming to the front, taking her hand kindly. "It 's very sad altogether. We 're in great trouble at Plas Dhu, as perhaps you 've heard; all ruined, and my father's had a stroke, and Kefn Glas all gone to the dogs, and the works and pits to be taken possession of by the creditors. But my mother 'll do all that she can do, and that 's right—I know that—by Evan's widow, as you really are," he repeated

bravely, with an earnestness in his glowing face, which touched Choicy, and made her forgive a great deal, but which Cilian seemed hardly even to notice.

"It ayn't that I 'm wanting to be owned, only that you should know *he* meant me well, and was kind, only he was took from me or ever he could do me justice altogether," and her interest even as she spoke wandered off to the shore.

"You 're wringing wet through, child," said Choicy, anxiously, taking hold of her sister's stuff gown, you must come in and let me dry you at least."

"Be I? It is the salt weeds down in the cove ; it will do me no harm," answered Cilian, carelessly. "What do it matter drying? I shall surely be wet again directly. There is a current just here, they do say, that brings in things from far away."

"You must and shall come in, Cilian," said Choicy, taking hold of her sister's arm.

"There shall be no time lost, Cilian, if you do ; I'll borrow a horse and ride along the coast, and enquire whether there 's anything to be seen or heard, come !" cried Harold, anxious to be doing something, and seizing her other arm, he almost compelled her to ascend the hill.

Cilian yielded at last to their gentle violence, and walked back again to the house, where she submitted to take food like a child, and to lie down on the box bed, where she remained half unconscious for a time, lulled by the warmth and her own utter exhaustion.

Choicy herself, wearied out body and mind, sank into a dose on a chair beside her, and all was still within the room except for the dashing waves which came plunging on the rocks outside with a hollow roar, which went on with its ceaseless undertone of sadness in her ears. Suddenly she started up—the bed was empty—the girl was gone ; it was the expected low tide, and she had been seen following the now bare line of shore to the cove. Choicy followed as rapidly as she could. It was already late in the

afternoon ; the red sun was setting over the open water with a pomp of glorious light, and surrounded by flocks of crimson and purple clouds. High up to the zenith spread the golden radiance, till it melted into a pale greenish blue, out of which shone a single star, growing momentarily brighter as the flush faded out of the sky. She scrambled on, and came at last in sight of her sister, alone on the bare solitary shore, where the pitiless cliffs seemed to close in upon her, and shut out all else but themselves and the sea.

The coast was seamed with narrow clefts or rents in the sharp rocks, many of them never dry even as now at the lowest water mark. On this, the west side of the promontory of St. Evian's, where the reefs ran far out to sea, it was only when the rays of the sinking sun shone horizontally into the heart of the crevices that their dark recesses were lighted up, in a way impossible at any other time of the day. Cilian had been searching each in turn, and was now stooping over the largest of the rents, and gazing intently into its shadows. The deep green water flowed in and out, swaying to and fro with a low lapping murmur which sounded to her excited fancy like the licking of the lips of the hungry waves. Long, loose threads of green seaweed rose and fell on the water, looking like locks of hair, and when a whiter stone or a rounded form of rock came suddenly into view, her heart stood still with expectation.

"Look, Choicy!" cried she, excitedly, leaning over the perpendicular walls of the chasm. "Look, look! I'm sure it 's there!" and, half-maddened by the impossibility of making out the details, she threw her arms over her head as she cried, "Run, run to the farm over there, tell 'em to bring ropes and poles, and a board, and all—quick, quick, or it 'll be gone."

Help was soon at hand. Harold had returned from his fruitless quest, and with the assistance of some farm labourers the body was landed, though with much difficulty, safely upon the edge of the chasm.

“That ’s the grey coat he went off in, and the ring on his finger,” cried Cilian, trying to snatch hold of it.

The dreadful search was over ; the fearful thing which she had so longed and dreaded to find was there at last ; the strain which had kept her up through those terrible days of waiting gave way, the spring broke, and she sank down in a state of merciful unconsciousness.

“He must be buried quick,” said the men. “Go you off for the parson as fast as may be, we must carry him up somehow to St. Evian’s at once.”

There was a little, lone, old ruined chapel, covered with ivy, which stood on the very edge of the cliff, where was the ancient graveyard of the village community ; the very ground on which it stood was passing away, like the bodies it contained, gradually undermined by the sea below, which brought down masses of rock and soil winter after winter, the hungry waves eating away the land piecemeal whenever there was a storm. Here they hurriedly prepared a grave for the body, by the waning light of the evening, helped by a rude flaring torch of tarred rope. There was no time to be lost ; and as soon as the clergyman arrived,—dust to dust, ashes to ashes,—Evan was laid in the quiet earth, while his poor wife lay below in the little cottage in helpless ignorance of what was going on. He had torn her up by the roots, like the wild flowers at Castell Dhu, and had flung her aside as carelessly. He had thought, so far as he had thought at all, to make amends for any pain or sorrow he had inflicted in some “green alleys of the future,” where all was to be easy, and to go right, and the end was to justify the means. His self-gratification was to afford himself much joy, and to hurt no one else. But it is not given to us thus to discount the future, and fate had taken him and his desire for reparation into its own hands, had cut short all his good intentions, his excellent wishes, his uncertain reachings after right—the stern realities of death had stepped in, he had gone to his account with his Creator, and had not “done what he could.”

CHAPTER XXV.

“NOT SPILT LIKE WATER ON THE GROUND ;
NOT WRAPP'D IN DREAMLESS SLEEP PROFOUND ;
NOT WANDERING IN UNKNOWN DESPAIR
BEYOND THY VOICE, THINE ARM, THY CARE ;
NOT LEFT TO LIE LIKE FALLEN TREE ;
NOT DEAD—BUT LIVING UNTO THEE.”

WHEN Cilian returned to consciousness, all was over. She started up, at first not knowing where she was. “What is it that has happened to me?” she cried ; then, as with a groan she came back to the grievous reality of life, she hid her face in the pillow. “I must get ready for the burying!” she said, with a stifled cry.

“It 's all over, my poor one ; lie still, you can do no more,” said her sister, who had not left her side. “They're coming back but now from it.”

But Cilian was already too ill to hear. It was a fearful night. Harold spent the time in riding after help. A doctor and the nurse arrived at last, but little could be done, and by midnight all was still, while her life was ebbing fast away.

“I 'm thankful it could n't live,” said Cilian, so faintly that her sister could hardly hear the words—“I 'd nothing to leave it but sorrow, and who knows that they mightn't have scorned it up at Plas Dhu ? They won't treat it so where it 's gone to.”

She seemed never to realise the state of things at Plas Dhu.

“Christ have mercy on thee ; Lord have mercy on thee ! Pray, my child, pray,” cried Choicy, with earnest tenderness, as she hung over her.

“Pray thou to Him ! He 'll hear thee, Choicy, what has trusted and loved Him all thy life. Amen. God bless thee. I 've been a wayward child, but I 'm sorry for what

I've done amiss. Will they let me be with Evan in next world, do thou think?" And the poor eager face looked up into her's with a passionate longing that went to her very heart.

Choicy paused; her theology and her heart gave different answers. "You're a going to a loving Father, my darling," she said at length, "and He'll do the best for all His children, the tempted ones not last, shall He not have told us so? He knows all things."

"Then He knows I can't be good nor blessed without Evan there, wherever it is," muttered Cilian, quickly, closing her eyes, and turning as if to sleep. She never spoke again, but so passed in silence away.

When all was over, Choicy stood tearlessly by the bed gazing on the grand features, cut out as it were in marble, whence all pain, and sorrow, and anguish had passed away, and marked the solemn peace which had gathered over the face she loved so well, now no longer tempest driven; there was a look almost of surprise on it, as if she for the first time *saw*;—"And in His light shall she see light," repeated Choicy to herself earnestly, and her own heart grew still. "God shall provide," she answered to her own doubts and misgivings.

"She shall be buried up at St. Evian's by him that was her husband, if ever one was by rights, though I'm not clear whether he meant to do rightly by her or no—Heaven only knows now, in that place where he's gone to," said she, gravely, to Harold, when he came in later in the morning.

He bowed his head in silence, as he looked with awe at the solemn face before him lying in its stillness, its uncomplaining, mysterious, mute pathos; she was beyond the reach of regrets or hopes. Eternal life had begun for her. What did it mean for those who were gone? For the moment at least he realised the sternness of an irrevocable past as he had never done; of the action which seems at the moment of its doing so insignificant and fleeting, but which will bear its fruit for ever, and which eternity itself cannot

cause not to have been. But Harold's was not a nature to do more than glance at such a thought, and pass on weary with its weight.

"She was a grand creature; I wish Evan had let her alone, that 's what I do," he muttered to himself. "But my little Gwenny for me, if I could get her," he went on in his own thoughts. "What can I do for you, Choicy? I ought to go home and tell my poor mother how it all is; I know just how she 'll go on worrying, waiting and hoping to the last, till she knows it 's all over and he 's buried. She 'll never give up as long as there 's a ray of hope left for her to cling to."

"You 'll surely be here to do honour to her that was your brother's wife," said Choicy, anxiously, "and you can never get back in time—they won't wait beyond to-morrow."

"Certainly, I 'll be back for the burial."

She shook her head. "You must stay."

He hesitated. "I 'll just write to mother, and tell her all, and get some mourning, or anything you want. There won't be time, I do believe, to get to Plas Dhu and here again," said the young man, kindly, at last. And he went off with a restless desire to do something and go somewhere to drive away unquiet thoughts, so as to fill up the interval of time which must elapse before all was over.

The whole village turned out to follow Cilian to her grave; she was one of themselves, a Welshwoman. Her story had been told far and wide, and had gone very near the hearts of the people. As the long train of men, women, and children streamed after the coffin, and wound slowly along the steep cleft of the valley, and up to the little chapel on the crag, they began to sing their Welsh hymns, in parts, very fervently: the wail of the great body of voices rose and fell upon the wintry wind, mingling with the roar of the mighty sea far below, a fitting dirge for wasted passion, youth, beauty, promise of all kinds, coming to their untimely end.

"Lay thy griefs upon His breast,
Where the wicked cease from troubling,
And the weary are at rest,"

was the meaning of the mournful burden which came again and again in solemn chorus till they reached the summit of the cliff, where they grouped themselves upon the grey, broken walls, the ruined tombstones, the grassy mounds, for the short service in the wet and cold.

Harold walked beside Choicy—dry-eyed, even before the grave, to his surprise: her grief lay too deep for tears, or for any outward demonstrations. The loss of one she had loved like her own child, was nothing to the anguish she had endured during the previous months, and now she had laid her dead before the Lord, that He might have mercy on her, and could wait upon His mercy.

CHAPTER XXVI.

OF THE PAST AND THE FUTURE.

As Harold and his companion, on their homeward way, rode down over the hill near Bodavon, the long grey outline of Mrs. Randolph's house came in sight, through the leafless branches of the great elm trees, and he said wistfully, "I ought to stop, and tell my old aunt about Evan; I believe she loved him better than any one else in the world. And she was very fond of Cilian, too. Won't you come in?" he added, kindly, as he saw Choicy preparing to get down from the gig.

"I shall just walk along the road, and you shall soon be after me," answered she, in a low voice; she could not yet bear any discussion of her dead darling, especially with one of Evan's relations.

Mrs. Randolph was sitting bolt upright as usual in her great armchair, with an eager look of expectant waiting in her face, very pathetic, when accompanied by her utter helplessness.

"What! Evan drowned, and Cilian dead too!" shouted the old lady, with a thump on the arm of her chair, which sorely tried the rheumatic hand.

"You 've hurt yourself, Aunt Randolph," said her nephew, compassionately.

"To be sure I have, I always do hurt myself more than any one else, don't you know that? Go on, I say! they told me there was bad news, but I would n't believe it. How dare you come and tell me sad things? And just when I was hoping they were safe married, and would come and live with me here, and we 'd all be comfortable together, instead of my being obliged to put up with that poor hussy of a girl I 've got now. And there 's that great, hulking fellow your father, ruined, root and branch, they tell me, and the old place that 's been in your mother's family, heaven knows how long before the flood, to be sold up! There 's a pretty tale to be told! And he 'd ruined you all first, body and soul together too, before he did for the property, that 's what I shall always think, and say, till the end of the chapter. Humph," she snorted.

"I 've not been home these several days," answered Harold, wearily, "and I don't know what 's been going on, but I suppose that everything 's about burst up at Kefn Glas by this time."

"I 've wrote to Iseult, (I mean your mother,) to tell her for to come up here to me whenever she chooses; her home 's here, whatever time she pleases, but she 's taken no notice, only sending just a few loving words about my boy and her's, as she calls him, that 's gone, though she would n't give up hopes that he 'd be heard of yet. And that 's what they said she went on and on repeating, over and over again, when I sent over last. She 'll just be broken hearted to have lost Evan, I know she will, so you 'd best take heed how you tell your tale to her, and not blurt it out as you 've done to me! He was the very apple of her eye, was poor Evan."

Then, as at last the old woman noticed the depressed

expression of Harold's face, saddened by the dismal experiences of the last week, and by the misery he had witnessed, and shared in, "Tell me more, boy, tell me all about it," cried she, bursting into tears; "I do believe I am growing harder than door nails, and as cross as a turkey cock, to talk like this when my poor Evan is scarce cold in his grave, and I have n't heard a word how it all came to be, and not even how you found him."

"I went off with Cilian's sister," began Harold, "or I never should have lighted on them, and brought her back."

"What! you don't mean to say you've got her there outside in the cold! Fetch her in directly. She'd tell me twenty times as much as you can, and with fifty times the gumption. My poor Cilian always spoke very highly of her, I remember, in the old days."

"She won't come in; I don't think she cares to talk much about her sister."

"Go and tell her she must; nay, that 'll not do neither. Tell her I am an old woman that scarce can stir in her chair, and that I ask it of her; I know she would n't refuse if she knew how I cared for the girl."

Thus adjured, Choicy unwillingly appeared, and stood before the fierce old invalid, who looked her through and through in silence—neither spoke.

"Eh dear! how unlike you two are! I never should have thought you were sister to that Cilian of yours; I could have loved her like a child of my own, if things had gone right, and they'd come home to me here," said Mrs. Randolph at last, in a broken voice. "You must n't think you're alone in grieving for her, Mrs. Howell."

Choicy suddenly took hold of the gnarled old hand, and kissed it, then in her gentle voice she said, "I'll just go and sit in the kitchen, and wait till Mr. Harold shall have told you all and about it; you must have a deal to say and to hear, ma'am."

And before the surprised Mrs. Randolph could remon-

strate, she had left the room, with a quiet firmness from which there was no appeal.

"She can't, and she won't talk, that 's clear," said the old woman with a sigh. "Go on, Harold, you 're better than nothing, anyhow."

In spite of the rebuff, the young fellow did his best, and with far more sense and feeling than he had ever shown in his life before. The shallow stream of self-indulgent nothings, of self-seeking pleasure, which he had called life, had been rudely dried up; he had been forced to feel both for himself and for others. Taken possession of, carried away by the great tide of sorrow and suffering which had swept over him, his kindly, even if not very wise, nature had been roused and softened. He never could again be the same empty-headed, scatter-brained fellow he had been before; even the lines of the round, good natured face had deepened, and had more meaning in them than they had a week before.

Mrs. Randolph felt the difference at every turn in his story as he rambled on, and treated him accordingly.

As he got up at last to start afresh on his homeward way, he said, with a sigh, "You have n't had anything to do with the folk up at Brynvelyn, have you, Auntie? I've seen nothing and heard nothing of them since all that coal and iron is said to have been found in the place, and that Gwenny is likely to be rich. It seems a little queer, don't it? But then, everything and everybody turns against a man when he 's down, and you get more kicks than halfpence from people you'd hardly think it of, Aunt Randolph. There! will you believe it? I called at the Morgans' door in Kefn Glas, when I heard that Gwenny had come there (it was just before I started after poor Evan), and she would n't see me! I'm sure I can't think what it meant, and I had n't time that day to find out anything afterwards. But I must n't waste any more time here talking; poor mother 'll just be on thorns till she hears all about things.

It's almost night as it is, and we shan't get home before it's pitch dark, and the road so stony. I could scarce persuade Choicy to stop a minute, she was in such a way to get home to her husband and children."

"I should like to have seen more of that woman; there was a wonderful deal in her face; but get you gone, lad; I know you ought n't to stop away from mother any longer," said his Aunt, sighing, as he left the house, and the old silence fell around her like a pall.

Mrs. Randulph could not, however, complain now of the monotony of her life. The day after Harold had appeared "with all that wretched knock-me-down news," as the old lady called it, Llewelyn sent up word he wanted sorely to see her.

"Well, Brynvelyn," said she, as he entered, "what is t? I hope your mother's all well. What's this fine news I hear about the coal found on your property?"

"Mother is laid up with the so bad rheumatics, and I'm come, madam, to ask you for the so good counsel you can always give." Mrs. Randulph looked very gracious; she liked to be consulted.

"You know that Mr. Harold shall have wanted to marry our little Gwenny, and we shall be noways that way of thinking. He was above us, and below us, too, in one way," said the old man, drawing himself up. We did not think he shall be very steady, and we would not have the child looked down on in the family, for Mr. Lancaster, he would not hear speak of it, and so there shall be an end. But now my Gwenny shall have money; and Mr. Harold nothing, and Mr. Lancaster as good as dead, and my mother she thinks greatly of the old blood, and she shall want to know, as you shall always be so friendly to us all, what you shall think to say to their wedding, and whether Mr. Harold shall make a good husband for the child and treat her well, for she's thought a great deal of him up there on our hill," and the poor father looked anxiously into the old lady's face to see her real mind behind her words.

Mrs. Randolph took a long pinch of snuff, and sat considering in silence.

"Well, Brynvelyn," said she at last, "if you 'd a come to me a week or two ago, I should have said, Don't have anything to do with the lad. I tell you so fairly, to show that I don't speak because he 's my nephew, or anything but bare truth, as is only right when you ask me face to face as a friend."

"I do believe that, Madam Randolph, or I should n't be here," said Llewelyn, eagerly.

"But the boy has done very well these last days on the search for his brother. He 's gone through a great deal, and he 's behaved as if he 'd got a heart and something of a head, though it may n't be a very big one ; and I think your daughter may go further and fare worse. There 's the makings of a respectable man in Harold if he 's well guided, and you 'd see to that, I know. There 's no vice in the colt, only foolishness and want of training," said she, gravely. "And I 'll tell you what, Llewelyn, all I have (it is n't much ; most of my money dies with me), will go to my niece, Iseult Lancaster, but I 'll settle it on Harold after she 's done with it, so that he shan't come empty-handed into his marriage, but shall show he has the upholding of the family here if you shall let him have your little Gwenny. Now my poor boy 's gone, I 've nobody left to look forward to but Harold, and you and I might set him on his legs and keep him there. I should be much beholden to you if you consent, and that 's not what I would choose for to say to scarce anybody, I can tell you, Llewelyn," the old lady ended, with her most dignified air, and laying her hand on Gelert's head, who had assisted with great gravity and intelligence at the consultation, and now gave his own assent by going and licking Llewelyn's hand, much to his mistress's internal satisfaction.

"It is like yourself, Madam Randolph, and I am more obliged than I can tell, and so shall be my mother, for it is a sore trouble to me and her, with all this money coming,

and fools and knaves, may be, buzzing round the so young girls, and at least Mr. Harold wanted her before the money came," said Llewelyn, rising, and taking leave with a sigh.

The danger of fortune-hunters was nearer already than the father knew. Gwenny had returned a day or two before from Kefn Glas, and was at that very moment making her confidences to her sister in the intervals of a batch of baking which was going on over the peat fire.

"I do so want to tell you all about it, Essie, how it did all be with me at cousin Morgan's," she began hurriedly. "She did say to me, was I going to give all that money to such a spending, thriftless do-nothing as Mr. Harold? That's what she did say one morning!"

"How dare she speak so?" cried Essie, indignantly, "when she knows that you do be sure to marry him some day!"

"Well, p'rhaps I may, but p'rhaps I shall not, surely," said Gwenny, coquetting with her new sash. "He never did nothing to make Mr. Lancaster, his father, consent when he was big and I was little, cousin Morgan do say, and why for should he come in for all them nice pits and things now he shall be down and I am up? she says. And Mr. Thomas Price, when he asked me, very handsome, for to marry him——"

"Asked you to marry him?" cried Essie, horrified, "after only five days you shall know him!"

"He *did* say he was not worthy of the honour," went on Gwenny, complacently, "but if I should so please it would give him much satisfaction, and he did think it a shame as the drones should get that money of mine, away from the so good working bees, and he was well off, and a very nice home, too, to offer me."

"Gwenny," said Essie, very seriously, "how dare you let that woman put such things into your head? If you do love Mr. Harold, as you told me you did very little time back, there shall not be any 'hims' or 'mines,' but it is all 'ours,' for moneys and everything. And it is great

joy for to have something to give which he shall not have, and nothing too good for him that you do love well. What ! turn your back upon him now that he is poor, and shall be ruined and all with the works stopped ! I cannot think it of you, not at all ! He did not wait till you shall have the good gold before he wanted for to marry *you*, as cousin Morgan's son shall have tried to do. That is not the true love, not one bit, dear."

"However do you know so much about it, Essie ?" replied Gwenny, much astonished, "and you up here on the hill always, and scarcely never seeing nothing nor nobody !"

"And I am very sure," went on her sister, eluding the question, as she arranged the peats round the baking pan, "that Granny, when you do have gone so far with Mr. Harold, and thought so much of him, will never hear of your so quick change for nobody else, and surely not for the quite common Mr. Thomas Price," observed Essie, with lofty scorn in her little gentle face, and serious, earnest eyes, which opened large to their full extent, as she uttered her homilies on constancy.

"Don't you tell her, don't you tell father, not for nothing at all," cried Gwenny, in an agony of fright at her own dereliction from the paths of constancy and virtue in her sister's eyes. "I was only think what it meant as they all went on dinning it into me, and telling you how it all shall go and happen down there at Kefn Glas, where they shall think very little of Mr. Harold, I can tell you ! But I never did say 'Yes' to Mr. Thomas Price, not at all, for all he should press me so very much, and I don't mean to, what 's more ! And I don't think I did ever think of it really for a minute, not at all, only you was in such a hurry," ended the girl tearfully, with a rising colour, and shaking her bright locks at the injustice of such an unmerited accusation.

"I am very glad for to hear it, that 's what I am," replied Essie, smiling, and quite content to take her sister's implied blame. "It is much better so, indeed," she went

on, as her father came in from his colloquy with old Mrs. Randolph, at the bottom of the hill.

"It's all right," he said smiling, to his mother, as he wiped his forehead after the long climb. "Come here, Gwenny 'vach,' I want for to speak to you; nay, you need not be afraid, I have somewhat to say what I think you will so much like to hear, my little girl."

CHAPTER XXVII.

EXPLANATION.

THERE were very difficult and painful explanations to be demanded from poor Choicy after the dreary, wet, cold journeyings to which she was so little accustomed, and with the sorrowful heart which she brought back with her. On the morning after she reached home she was wearily putting her room in order, which looked almost as forlorn as the remembrances which she brought back to it. Even as she attended sadly to her baby Cilian, the thoughts of the young sister who had so lately dwelt with them there, now gone for ever, and lying far away in her untimely grave, filled her heart. "What shall you come to, dearie," she whispered tearfully over the tiny face in her arms, "when you shall grow up to be a great girl, and shall you break your own heart and ours I wonder, caring for the wrong man and we not able for to help?" Presently she saw Barnard Morris coming up the steps. His manner was almost angry as he sat down. Without speaking, but looking round the house for what he was bitterly conscious he should never see there more, he waited for a pause in her operations, while she went nervously to and fro, dreading what was coming, and anxious as to the mood in which he might speak at last.

"Tell me, Choicy, I want to know it all how it was," said he at last, gloomily.

"What shall I say? when it is all best left dumb now they are both gone away," answered she, unwillingly.

"Why is he not alive, that I might see to him to take it out of him for that which he has done?" muttered he in a low concentrated tone, biting his lips, and resting his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands.

"He do be dead, Barnard; let his memory be. What good do it do now raking up all them sharp thoughts that be like knives for to run into one? Let him be—in his grave," replied Choicy, sadly.

"What, forget it to him! When he took her away from me only to serve her so? I could have forgave him if he had made my darling happy, and clung to her his life through. I shall always believe if she hadn't set eyes upon his face she'd ha' listened to me as time went on, I know she would," he cried with increased feeling; "but there he came with his fine linen, and his fine ways, and his fine words, and what chance had I with being rough and no gentleman like him? I saw it in her eyes last time I was face to face wi' her, up at Bodavon, but I didn't guess for why. She let on there was a reason, but I were such a fool that it never so much as come into my head how it were all drifting. I wish I'd spoke, even then."

"What good could come of anything? It was fated so to be," said Choicy, sadly.

"And now I'll never forget it to him in this world or the next. My curse be on his head for whenever I meet him, whether it be hundreds of years hence," muttered he in a low voice, but clenching his fist fiercely. "He's gone to the bad place, surely, for what he did, and I'm glad of it—I'm glad of it," he burst out in his excited tones.

"Oh, Barnard!" cried Choicy, holding up her hands, "how can you go on like that? It is like when the heathen do rage, what David tells of. How can you ever pray the prayer of the Lord Jesus, and say, 'forgive me as I forgive

them that trespass against me,' when you shall speak so of Mr. Evan what is gone to his account, and Cilian with him?"

"That 's the worst of it," he interrupted.

"It was all so bad, I thought, as could be, and now you do make it worse with your ravings and cursings like this, breaking my heart." And for the first time in all her sorrow she broke down and wept bitterly; the babe in the cradle hearing its mother's sad voice caught the infection, and the house seemed full of wailing.

Barnard had a man's horror of seeing a woman cry, and relaxed a little. "I will not curse him any more, Choicy," he said; "I will leave him to his conscience; p'r'aps he may get one to vex him where he is, though he 'd never a one here to serve my darling as he did; and it may plague him very sorely I 'm thinking, p'r'aps, down there where he 's surely gone to."

"It will not do much good forgiving him after that fashion, Barnard," replied Choicy, shaking her head, and half-smiling as she hushed her crying baby to sleep on her breast.

"I tell you what, Choicy, I should get a better mind away from this place, which feels enow to stifle one betimes. Me and mother is moving directly. The shop 's ruined, and she 's bankrupt. I can get work fast enough anywhere, and she 'll just bide with me. Let 's all keep together; you and Howell can't stop to starve here, surely. Let 's find another home, and you can begin somewhere again along wi' us if you shall so please!"

Kefn Glas was indeed no place for Howell after this time, or even its neighbourhood. The leader in an unsuccessful strike is welcome neither to masters nor men; the unpopularity of failure clung to the man who had had the misfortune to see more of the other side of the question than suited uncompromising partizans. It was remembered against him that he had not always pinned his faith absolutely upon the Union dogmatists; and narrowness of perception and ignorance of any views but their own are

great elements of success and influence among many men besides Unionists.

"Mr. Harold has been here, very kind," said Choicy to her husband the same evening, "asking if he can help any ways, as he had heard we were going away, as Barnard's been talking of. But I did tell him we were much beholden to him, but we could get through." She spoke with gentle pride.

"But he said, if we was going for to move, would we have the Plas Dhu cart and horses for to carry our bits of things? He should not have them much longer to lend, he said, nor to use neither, but we were welcome, and more, while they had them still, he said. He has a kind heart, has Mr. Harold, and I 'm sure he meant well." She had been won over by their many days of companionship to as different a conception of the master's son, as Howell had been of the manager, and with true feeling, would have been glad to show her friendship by accepting the help thus freely offered.

"We shall best let him and all of them be; we don't want them, and they don't want us. Let be, we can get along without help from any one of them, I 'm thankful to say," answered Howell, somewhat haughtily. I 've been settling with Barnard to day, and we shall be off now on Monday."

"And Ivor?" said Choicy, anxiously.

"Soon as we may be a little settled down we can have him to follow. I shall feel to breathe freer, and begin afresh once we 're out of this dead-alive old place."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN CALMER WATERS.

A SECOND stroke brought Mr. Lancaster's stormy life to a close, and on the day of his funeral, having still heard nothing from her niece, Mrs. Randolph solemnly ordered a fly, and was driven in state down the hill, to take

matters into her own hands. She had never once visited Plas Dhu since her niece's marriage had displeased her, and it was no small effort to the old lady to enter the walls she had not seen since her brother's death, with all the recollections of family pride and family affection freshly stirred, which had been so rudely shaken during now nearly thirty years. She drew her hard hand over her old eyes, and could hardly bear to look out as they neared the home where her girlhood had been spent, and which her belongings had possessed during so many generations.

The place bore every day, more and more, the melancholy neglected look of a ruined family. The gate was off its hinges, the wall was broken down; the zeal for destruction of all the boys in the little town had burst out with redoubled vigour in favour of a property hitherto so jealously guarded; the boughs of the trees had been torn down, the laurels and shrubs dragged about and hanging over the approach, so as almost to prevent the entrance of a carriage. It was now nobody's business to set anything straight. The broken windows were filled with rags and paper, the kitchen door was open, cold as it was, and old Ianto sat muttering to himself in his corner, as she entered.

Cattoos was weeping in the buttery, where she was arranging some food for her mistress. The whole world seemed to them to have stood still, with the ruin of the nest that had sheltered them.

"What! is it Mrs Randolph?" said the old man, anxiously, "and time too, with poor mistress like a wave driven by the wind, and tossed, and no one to look to, nor nobody to turn to for help! What shall become of us all I cannot nowise think, with trouble dark all round," and the old man heaved a deep sigh. "And me, where will I go for to end my days? Will I go to the workhouse, ya sure?"

"Your mistress will never let that be, you may be very sure of that, Ianto," said Mrs. Randolph, making her way slowly and painfully into the inner room, where sat her

niece in her heavy mourning, and in a state of hopeless depression, with scarcely power left in her even to think, much less decide for herself, what next step in the downward course remained to be taken.

"Get up, Iseult," said her Aunt in her usual authoritative tones, though the tears were streaming down her old cheeks. "This is no place for you. Put on your bonnet and come with me; Catoos will see to packing all your things, and Harold can be trusted, I'm sure, to see to all that can be done," added she, as her nephew came in from a stormy interview with the creditors.

"Go, dear mother, it's no good your stopping here," said Harold, kindly, when she turned helplessly to him, "I'm no great hand at business, but I'll do my best. There's a good deal belongs to you I know in the house, and I'll see to everything being done straight."

And through the open door came the voice of old Ianto, defending his mistress's property, crutch in hand, against the bailiffs.

"The whole furniture shall belong to my mistress, and not a stick shall you any of you touch," he shouted, furiously.

As Mrs. Lancaster passed by him she stopped, and laid her hand on his shoulder. "You shall be seen to, my poor Ianto, if it be with my last penny; and Cattoos shall look after you in this house here, if I can manage it with the creditors. Take heart, take heart," and with the good counsel which she could not follow herself, the poor woman burst into tears, moved by the weight of others' sorrows more keenly than by her own. "It's dreadful when all these, who have no fault in it, must bear the heaviest burden of all," she sobbed, pitifully, as she was thrust into the carriage by her impatient old Aunt, who pulled up both windows with a jerk, which threatened to guillotine Mrs. Lancaster, nodding her last farewells out of one of them. They drove off amidst a confused murmur of sorrow and rage from within Plas Dhu, and shouts from a crowd of

boys collected in great excitement out of all the roads and gutters round, to enjoy the sight without feeling any necessity for knowing the cause of it.

"I've got you safe, Iseult, and I shall keep you safe," said the poor old woman, when they reached quiet Bodavon, exhausted with her unwonted effort, and more upset than she cared to show. It was, indeed, a haven to Mrs. Lancaster. But even her gentle temper and indolent sweetness were long in accommodating themselves to her new lot. She missed the anxiety and the fears and troubles of her past life; and the dread of being a burden in money matters to her aunt, who had already hampered herself more for Evan's sake than she ever chose to tell, weighed heavily upon her. She took to pitying and spoiling Harold, as she had done Evan before him. His task was indeed rather a hard one: heir to nothing but debts; at the head of ruined affairs which he knew nothing whatever about; required to explain to angry creditors what he so little understood himself; and to unravel business matters to which he could find scarcely any clue. He was trying also to save something out of the fire for his mother. She had given up the small sum that had been settled on her by her husband, but she had rights on the property at Plas Dhu devolving on her from her father, which were fiercely debated by the contending lawyers.

"Poor Harold! I'm so sorry!" repeated his mother every time he came up to Bodavon, looking harrassed and driven. "It's so sad for all this trouble to come upon you, and for my sake too! when I could do with so little, if only they would allow me enough to live upon."

"Who's 'they,' I wonder," cried her Aunt, angrily. "You just let Harold be: it's the very best thing ever happened to him, to be made to feel responsible, and to be forced to do a spell of good work. It'll make a man of him, if it can be done. And as for its all being for your sake, why, of course, he ought to work for his own mother. But the best part of the money will come to him in time, so it

is for his own sake quite as much as yours. I hate humbug. Humph!" and the old lady shoved her wig a little on one side, as she was apt to do when she was annoyed. Then recovering her temper she went on: "When he's pushed to the wall he behaves with a deal more sense and discretion than I'd thought was in him, Iseult, and I've told Llewelyn so, so I've opened that door for him, if you and he choose to go into it, and you like the girl that he's after well enough."

Mrs. Lancaster looked doubtfully. "I wish she had a little more education," she said at last.

Her Aunt struck her hand with wrath on her chair elbow as usual, and suffered as usual. "Why, what the deuce, Iseult! I didn't think you were such a perfect idiot! How would the girls with 'education,' as you call it, put up with such as Harold, I should like to know? and he without a penny to call his own into the bad bargain! The Llewelyns are the best people I know hereabouts or anywhere. She's come of a good stock, and she's a good girl, and she'll have something to live on. What, by all that's reasonable, do you want more? I think he's a very fortunate fellow, that's what I do, and has got much better than he deserves. And you'd much better go and give him a helping hand up there on the hill than sit bemoaning his hard fate down here. That's the common-sense of it all, and that's all I have to say to you both, so now you may please yourself for what I care."

Mrs. Lancaster did as she was bid. It had been her lot through life, except on the single occasion of her own marriage, which had turned out so ill that it was hardly to be wondered at if she had never vindicated her independent judgment since that unfortunate exercise of it.

And as she toiled breathlessly up the steep hill, where no carriage could possibly go, she was trying to prepare herself to come up to Harold's somewhat contradictory injunctions and requirements as to her demeanour, which he inculcated zealously all the way.

"You'll be kind to her, mother," repeated he, not for the first time.

"Yes, dear," answered she with a slow smile, stopping to rest. "Whatever else am I coming all this long hard way for?"

"And you'll mind and not frighten her, as you always do," went on Harold, with his usual want of tact.

"Am I used to be so very frightful?" replied Mrs. Lancaster sadly, remembering the little awe which her reign had inspired.

"No, not exactly frightening. I don't mean that; but you've a certain way with you for all that. I can't put it into words, but you know, I'm sure, what I mean. You'll get on well enough with Granny—she's of the old-fashioned sort; but Gwenny's more like the new ones, you know—like me!"

Even in her depression, Mrs. Lancaster could not help smiling.

Harold's reception when he came into the house at Brynfelyn with his mother was somewhat different from what it had been at Mrs. Morgan's door. The old people were touched and pleased at the effort which Mrs. Lancaster, in her painful circumstances and deep mourning, had made in their favour, and received her with delight. Gwenny was all smiles and dimples, blushing and bridling very modestly and prettily as she was introduced to her future mother-in-law, who kissed her affectionately, if with a certain sadness, and tried (successfully) to be cordial and kind. Amidst the little bustle and excitement which filled the large old farmhouse dwelling-room on their arrival, she however found all her real interest centreing in her little namesake, Essie, who stood a little apart, with a light in her eyes, sharing in the general joy, but as if she felt herself in a manner outside it.

Mrs. Lancaster sat and wondered what was the experience which could have made the sweet face so full of thought and feeling, at the sorrow in the large, soft grey

eyes which were watching her with such intense sympathy, and which contrasted strangely with the blooming young cheeks. There was a gentle repose in the whole expression as of one who looked on the joys and sorrows around her with an unselfish love, unmixed with any thought of her own future or her own feelings, as if her heart were in some still removed place, which made her look like one of the fair young saints in a Fra Angelico picture.

Mrs. Lancaster was talking to the others, but somehow turned always at last towards the girl whenever she could.

"We can remember how you used to come up here in the so old days, when you shall not be much older than Gwenny," said old Mrs. Brynfelyn to Mrs. Lancaster, smiling, "and a great pleasure and honour to see you always; and poor Mr. Evan, who shall seem to favour you, I shall always think whenever we did see him, and he so kind, and spoke something too to remember us of you when we did see him."

"Ah, and so *he* too used to come up here," thought the mother, as she tried to keep her thoughts and speech in hand for the more mundane matter in hand.

"You 'll come and see me, dear, sometime?" she said, almost involuntarily to Essie, when the visit came to a close, the Llewelyns with real feeling not pressing their hospitalities upon her as was their wont. She was answering the unspoken thoughts which had come to her from the girl's eyes—and eyes say many things which words are powerless or unwilling to express—and she uttered her invitation low, as if there were some secret understanding between them, while she was trying painfully to avoid hearing the account of the sorrowful story at St. Evian's, all the details of which Harold was pouring forth at great length and much detail in the corner of the room to Gwenny, who listened, with a face resembling the very earthly cherub's with which Correggio has adorned the abbess' private sitting room at Parma.

She made ample atonement for any past shortcomings

in her interest for Harold, and, indeed, now persisted in regarding him as the principal hero of the whole story. The slight aberration in her course of true love, when her little head had been turned by flattery and the novelty of her heiressship, had so completely passed away that she honestly forgot that there had ever been a break, and—as is so often the case in such performances—believed that she had loved him with unchanging constancy all her life, to the great contentment of all parties concerned.

“It’s a good piece of work done; we won’t say of whose doing,” said Mrs. Randolph, taking a complacent pinch of snuff, as she listened to the account of the visit, and put sharp little questions whenever a point was slurred over by either mother or son. “I wonder how long it would have taken you before you’d gone for to smite that nail on the head! Why the girl would have been picked up, with half-a-dozen fortune-hunters after her, before you’d done shilly-shallying about whether she was ‘refined’ enough! A pretty story that! As to equality, stuff don’t wear well when one thread’s silk and t’ other cotton twist; best have both of ‘em of the same strand always, and Harold comes of his father’s side of the house. Too much hair about the heels for me, not like my poor Evan. Humph,” snorted the old lady in a loud aside, which it was not necessary for Mrs. Lancaster to hear, as she stood gazing out of the window, and trying not to think of her loss.

The old woman looked after her a little anxiously, as often happened after she had discharged one of her petards. “I wish you’d answer me back again, Iseult, there’s no pleasure in hitting hard when you don’t give it me as good,” and she half-laughed, with a glistening in her eyes, as her patient niece came up behind and kissed her. “But you know, and I know, that I shall do the same next time,” ended Mrs. Randolph with a smile.

The works at Kefn Glas continued to look wretched and woebegone, their silence creating wide-spread distress

among the workmen, whose strikes had been one great means of bringing them to a stop. But at length, after many years, as times improved, they too were once more set going in fresh hands, and rose with the tide of prosperity in the district, on the ruin of how many broken hearts and destroyed households, who could ever count ?

Long before that time, however, the gaunt house at Plas Dhu, which had been left desolate, unlet, and uninhabited—except by old Ianto—woke up again to life. Gwenny 'vach's' fortune turned out larger than had been expected ; the coal and iron upon Llewelyn's property were of great value and soon began to be worked to profit. She and Harold were able before long to make terms with the creditors for the useless old house, burdened with Mrs. Lancaster's rights as it was, and the whole was improved and renovated according to Gwenny's best lights, with most efficient help from the local architect. The very curious part of the building, full of hiding places and secret stairs, was pronounced rubbishy, and pulled down altogether ; sash windows took the place of the casements ; the panelled wainscots were painted over with a bright pea-green, or covered with a sweet pattern in drab paper ; the coats-of-arms picked out in fancy colours ; the lofty black-oak pillared chimney pieces were torn down and replaced by nice large mirrors, with broad gilt frames, and the ugly old carved chairs and presses were exchanged * for a genteel dressing room suite from the upholsterer's at the neighbouring town. " Altogether," as Gwenny observed with pride, " no one could have known the old place again ! " Mrs. Lancaster never interfered, and Mrs. Randolph was never told what was doing.

But though Gwenny's tastes in architecture and furniture were not perfect, her head and her heart were of better

* It may be a comfort to the lovers of old oak and Chippendale to know that the upholsterer, finding no sale for the lumber he had thus acquired, appealed to Gwenny's generosity, not in vain, to take it all back again, and, therefore, the best of the *relics* were still to be found in the garrets at Plas Dhu five and twenty years ago.*

material, and she made Harold a good and loving wife. She kept things together within and without the house, not obtrusively, but very efficiently, and managed matters with something of the tact and skill of her grandmother, to the great advantage of her husband.

Essie lived on alone with her father at the breezy Brynfelyn after old Gwenny had passed away, and never could be persuaded to spend as much time at Plas Dhu as her sister desired—the full-blown prosperity of everything there was perhaps a little oppressive.

The two were as unlike as possible, which is not at all uncommon with sisters. There had never been any real resemblance or sympathy between them, only an accidental outward conforming, like that of one bud to another before either is sufficiently open to shew the true character beneath the smooth undeveloped surface.

The void that poor Evan's death had left was filled before long even at Bodavon, more or less, when the mother's placid regret, as she sat knitting in the sun, petted and scolded by her old aunt, to whom she was as light to her eyes, with her grandchildren playing at her feet and sitting on her knees, could hardly be called grief in any distressing sense of the word. But the little warm heart on the yellow hill never forgot the hero whom she had created for herself out of the wealth of her own imagination. The ideal Evan, dressed in all the impossible virtues and graces with which she had endowed him, was far above any possible comparison with a mere mortal lover. "And Dora lived unmarried till her death."

"Still waters run deep." In her heart and Choicy's were the only true memorials of the pair who after life's fitful fever lay buried side by side in the sad, storm-swept, ruined graveyard of St. Evian's, with the wild sea birds and the winds around them, fit emblems of their wilful, wayward lives.



“JOHN ANDERSON, MY JO.”



“JOHN ANDERSON, MY JO.”

John Anderson, my Jo, John,
 We clamb the hill thegither,
 And mony a canty day, John,
 We 've had wi' ane anither;
 Now we maun totter down, John,
 But hand in hand we 'll go,
 And sleep thegither at the foot,
 John Anderson, my Jo.

“LOOKEE here now, if them there taters ayn't a bad lot,” said old Mary Hislop, coming to call her husband in to his tea, and frowning disapproval at the heap of blighted potatoes he was digging up with some difficulty, and a back stiff with rheumatism.

“'T is a sorry sight for we, surely; us 'll have to buy this turn. Wherever be a' the fine sunshine gone to, I can't think! Well, I 've done work for to-day, anyhow,” answered he, slowly straightening himself, and putting by his spade.

“Sims strange, too, now don't it? Ever sin' the Amerikins has a had the orderin' o' the weather, we 've never had a fine settled spell, not for a wik together. I 'm sure I wish God A'mighty 'd tak' to it agin, like as He used to do!” observed Mary, plaintively.

“'T ayn't likely, so to speak, as them folk across the watter ha' much to do chancing and changing the weather; 't is the winds as blows as they listes I take it, ony we gets it cold and strong; there 's nowt to stop 'em over that big pond Jammy telled us on,” answered old Emanuel, half-

laughing, as he followed his wife indoors. "I dunno ever I'd such trouble to git through wi' a job as to-day," he went on, throwing himself into the three-cornered chair.

He was a stout, short man, jolly, hale, and cheery, having never had a day's illness in his life. Mary was many years younger; a tall, slender woman, with the remains of great beauty in the finely-cut features and delicate outlines of her face, but worn by sickness, ailing and thoughtful, quiet, sad, and full of cares—the two seemed at the opposite poles of humanity. In spite of (or in consequence of) their extreme difference, however, each thought "no end" of the other.

"She 's the very best 'ooman ever lay by the side o' a man," said Emanuel with pride.

"There ayn't none o' them young uns as is fit to black his shoes to my master," observed Mary, under her breath, to her new crony, a cousin's child, who had just come to live within reach of the cottage, to the great comfort of the old people.

The solitary little home stood at the end of Bracken Lane, on a steep incline, overlooking a deep valley, where the river, the rail, the canal, and the road crossed and re-crossed each other in the narrowest possible limits. But as all passed on without the smallest communication with the little upland homestead, there was something in the noise and bustle of trains and passengers and carriages so near in space, so far off in thought, which seemed to make its seclusion in the midst of its garden, backed by a rocky wooded hill, still more complete. The rest of the village was nearly out of sight and hearing, as Mary never ceased rejoicing over. She was not social in her tastes and habits in general; but she greeted cousin Kate warmly, as a young woman put her head in at the open door, through which the late September sun was now shining softly and genially, lighting up the white jessamine and china roses, the carnations and gilly flowers outside.

"Well, Kate, but you 're as welcome as flowers in

May," she said, warmly, "we have n't a seed ye this three wiks, and more to spare."

"Set ye down, now, and ha' a crack," added Emanuel, making room at the tea-table, "and tell us a' about it."

"I've a bin over at Johnny Button's, what's going off to Queensland by the ship 'Nancy,' sailing from Liverpool; 't is a long way off, it is, for to drag along all them bits of childer across the salt sea."

"Queensland is it they're gone to? That 'll be no end of a way off belike. I'm thinking as it won't be long for myself afore I'm off to Kingsland, I do, and the sooner the better as I'm i' the goulden city wi' the Lord, and it were not for he; I pray the Lord night and day not before he, but it's according as it's His will, we can't odds it ony not to leave him. I never did feel so unaccountable queer as to day," said Mary under her breath, looking across at her man, who was a little deaf and did not hear.

"Why, ye nipped by so nimble they tells me t' other day i' the village," said Kate, consolingly; then, turning to the old man, "What queer thing ha' ye got there, Muster Hislop, a rummaging in yer lap?"

"'T is a little sucking pig as were giv' to Mary, one too many for the mother to nurse, and she feeds it out o' a teapot, wi' a bit o' wash-leather tied over the spout."

"Emanuel, he would tak' it," observed Mary, with a half smile. "I thowt he'd a had enow o' the last we had; we both on us spoilt him so, that we was bound to send him away; but he were much the worstest than this un."

"Eh, but he were a nice little thing, so loving to sit upo' one's lap, and then when he were tired o' bein' quiet, he'd just git down from off of yer knees for a bit o' a run, and then cry to be took up agin, just like a child, ony more sensibler, I allus said."

"Dear heart, but he were troublesome after a bit! He'd jump up when we was havin' our meals, and put his nose into the plates, and when we did send him down, that he should not eat wi' us, he would take the end of the table-

cloth in his mouth and pull all off the table and break the cups and plates and a'. I got a little whip for him, but 't were no good—we were 'blige to give him away."

"And precious sorry she was, too, to part with him, for all she talks so," added Emanuel, laughing. "'T were just arter she come down from bein' so bad upstairs, and I wi' the rheumatics so as I couldn't not git up to her nor she to me, but she'd talk to me down from her bed all the same, and me answer back agin loud enow to be heard up town. Law, how you would ha' laughed, Kate, an' you'd been here! But she's better now, she's better now," he ended, looking anxiously at his wife, as she lay back in her chair, white and exhausted. "Her 'll be a' right in a bit, God willing, won't she?"

Mary did not answer.

"I do believe I thowt I niver should ha' got through them taters to-day: that leg as were hurt in the quarry, he did ache so," said the old man, rubbing the offending member as he spoke. "I mun ha' my bed made up here i' th' house place agin, I do believe, Kate, if so be you 'll set it straight afore ye go."

"But the Lord he've a giv thee wonderful health and strength, and thee past aighty-fower," observed his wife, with pride.

"Yea, and thou 'rt but a choild to me, aighteen year younger nor me: thou 'st a many year to live," said the old man, a little tremulously.

"I've prayed so to th' A'mighty as I may not outlive him, and I dunno think He'll say me nay, Kate. He knew what 't was to love, did my blessed Saviour, and he know what 't is to see 'em die," she went on, under cover of her deafness, "but I mun strive not to go first, for then wha iver would he do by hisself?"

The next day when Kate came down to the cottag however, it was the old man who had begun to fail. He was nearly helpless, and his wife, ill as she was herself, had found the strength to come down and nurse him. She had

just "braved herself up" for the last time to be with him. Kate would not leave them. "I mun just stop wi' ye," said she; "'t is lucky as my master 's off on a job for a bit."

The time was not long. The strength of very old people often gives way quite suddenly under, apparently, a small illness. A few days after, as Mary was coming downstairs with great difficulty, leaning on Kate, he looked up and saw her and roused himself. "My dear old 'ooman, you just come and sit down aside o' me, and we'll ha' a cup o' tea together—a nice warm cup o' tea; 't will be the last we shall ever have here together," said he.

"As cheerful as summer," as Kate told the story afterwards to her husband. "It ayn't for long, God willin'," says she; and so it weren't, and next day, when he fell onsensible, I just persuaded her to stop upstairs; she couldn't scarce stand; and she says presently, so piteous, 'Is he still alive?' and then again, 'Is he still breathing?' And at last I says, 'He 's gone to his rest now, mother,' and then she just turned herself round to the wall and says nothing, lying so still. But she were quite sensible, and knew all as were going on downstairs, wi' the moving and the comin' and goin' and the talkin', but she niver said nowt. And there, the two days arter, just as the corpse went out at the garden gate, the old lady died; she just ceased to breathe, as 't were, when Emanuel were out on it. And now they 're together in Paradise, nobody shan't mak' me believe as they ayn't. God bless 'em; they was one here and will be hereafter i' the goulden city where He shall wipe a' tears from their eyes."

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TELL NO LYES:

A COLLIERY STORY.



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A COLLIERY STORY.

CHAPTER I.

It was pay day at the — pit, and a number of men and boys were standing about waiting to be summoned.

"Tellno Lyes, indeed!" 'T is the queerest name as ever I heerd speak on, it 's quite rediklous!" said a tall lout of a boy, about seventeen, with a coarse face, and bad expression. He thrust his big hands into his trouser's pockets, as he looked down at his companion with an arrogant stare of superiority.

Tellno was not above fourteen, and small of his age. His face was black with coal dust (as was that of all the colliers), out of which his bright blue eyes and white teeth shone like jewels.

"'T is not always them as is so precious proud o' telling truth, as is most to be trusted, *I* believe," said Simon, magisterially.

"But there 's nowt to be so precious proud of, sure-*ly* as o' telling the truth, father used to say," began Tellno, eagerly; but he was cut short, for his turn came for going up to receive his wage. It was his first fortnight at the pit, and had been rather a hard time for him—not made easier by Simon's despotic bullying whenever he came across his path. Tellno had been put in rather the better position underground, and one which Simon had set his heart on getting—he was jealous and angry accordingly.

The boy's wages are often higher in proportion than the men's, they can creep into smaller spaces, and do needful things which the men are unable to get at, and Tellno felt

grand and old indeed, when he received more money for his fortnight's work than he had ever earned in his life before. He was the only son of a widow, and his father's last words to him before he died had been, "Mind, thee mun be a good lad to thi mother." The boy had taken the charge upon himself with all his soul, and all the strength of his fourteen years.

The bulk of the colliers lived on the further side of the pit's mouth, in rows of ugly new houses, but he ran down the hill, past all the black, bare, unlovely neighbourhood of the works, to a very small old hamlet where the trees and hedges were still unspoiled by dust and smoke. In the last cottage, rather apart from the rest, lived Comfort Lyes. Her husband was a sober man in good work as carter to the ponies at the bottom of the coal mine, and they had been well off until the short, sharp illness that had taken him from her, only a few months before, and left her dependent to a great extent upon Tellno's earnings, though she did a little washing and charing when she could get the work.

It was a proud moment, when Tellno put his wages into her hand. "There, mother! it's a nice lot of brass now, aynt it?"

The mother's eyes glistened as she looked at her boy. "Bless thee, lad" was all she said, however, as she watched him turn to his work in and out of the house, "fettling" the pig, forking up potatoes, packing away some coals which had been poured out before the door, and ending by fetching two pails of water from the well which was some way off, for the working of the pits had lowered all the surface waters. He then got out the kettle, and the washing tub, and she began to scrub him vigorously. The colliers are very clean, and on Saturday night, after the pit work is over which blackens the whole body, a dozen or so of wives may be seen in a row of houses, each scrubbing down a husband squatting in his tub. Few labourers, indeed, know the taste of water so well as the pit-men.

"I 've done a good stroke of work with the taters i' th'

garden, mother," said Tellno, when the cleaning was done, and the clean clothes put on. "Do you know anything o' little Katie?" he went on, hesitatingly.

"She be gone up with the rest of them blackberrying to the Turnal Common. I heerd lots on 'em goo past an hour by," said his mother.

Little Katie, aged seven, was the youngest of a large family at Mansfield's, the joiner in the next stone cottage, a few hundred yards away, and an old sweetheart of Tellno's.

She was a particular little person, however, and had objected so greatly to his black face, that she would not allow him to kiss her, or indeed come near her, during the past fortnight. And Tellno, now conscious of his restored cleanliness, was anxious to make up the quarrel.

"Thee mun go after the blackberrying, lad, thou 'lt be back to supper," said his mother; "thee 's ttoiled enow for to day, I wunna ha' thee tied down like a negro slave;" and after a moment's consideration, Tellno was off like a shot.

High Turnal Common was a favourite play place, where blackberries and all other wild things flourished greatly. At one end, however, the ground had sunk irregularly some four or five feet over the workings of an old deserted coal pit. It was fenced round to prevent the cattle from getting in, for it was a dangerous place, full of hummocks, and hillocks, and deep holes, with an uncertain depth of black looking water in them, half hidden with over-hanging bushes and straggling undergrowth, but all the more tempting for this spice of peril to the children, though the smaller ones were strictly forbidden to go near the spot. The evening was closing in as Tellno came up, and an ugly rush of boys from the pits had turned little Katie and her sisters towards home, their tin cans only half filled with fruit.

"Oh, take care of us, the lads will be after us, go with us, Tellno!" cried Katie, as he came running up to join the boy crowd. He looked a little longingly after the

possible fun, and certain noise (noise, in itself, is delightful to a healthy boy), but gave it up to protect the little ones.

Katie had forgotten her grievances against him, and hung confidingly on to his hand.

"Ayn't it a pity, look! I 've got such a few!" complained she.

"You eat such a many yourself!" said her sister, laughing.

"I 'll get you some more, Katie, next Saturday, if so be I can manage it," answered Tellno, consolingly

"You ayn't black now, Tellno; I don't like you when you 're black. The divil's black, you know, and he 's like a roaring lion—don't you think he mun be all one as a black lion?"

Tellno did not feel up to deciding this difficult theological question, and was silent.

"I was *so* wicked, no later than Toosday, and then mother put me in the corner, and I made such faces at her! And she said I were as hard as door nails, and she kivered my head with my pinbefore, but there were a wee little hole where I 'd tored it, and I could see quite well all as was doing in the kitchen. So then she sent me to fetch the milk towards evening up the lane, and I felt quite sure I should meet the divil, just round the corner; I was so frit, Tellno, but I said my prayers out loud, and do you know he was n't there! I was *so* good all the week—till this morning," she added, conscientiously.

"You should 'nt praise yourself, Katie," answered Tellno, laughing.

"Did you ever meet him yourself, Tellno? Like a lion, you know?"

Tellno was not accustomed to make such immediate personal application of his texts, and paused for his reply.

"No; never—yet."

"P'raps you was not bad enough," said Katie, musingly. You 're not so wicked as I."

Tellno smiled down at this terrible sinner, whose great

brown eyes were looking up anxiously into his face. She was a beautiful child, with bright, brown, curly hair, and rich, ripe, red cheeks and lips.

"I don't think you 're so *very* bad, Katie," he said, affectionately.

"Oh but I am," answered Katie, rather importantly, frisking along by his side like a little puppy dog. One may be proud even of one's crimes.

"Tell y' what, Tellno. I 'm agoing to hear the Roaring Ranter o' Sunday, that 's to-morrow. Mother don't much hold with the Ranters, but Auntie, she begged and prayed that me should go with her. You 'll come with us, Tellno, won't ye?"

"It 's such fun," said her elder sister. "She comes back, and tells us all about it, and does it all like life, as grave as a judge, but she won't do nothink if anybody 's there."

"Won't you let *me* hear, Katie?" said Tellno, persuasively, but the child turned a deaf ear.

"There 's a big man i' th' Chapel called Emanuel, as has got but one eye, and he keeps that shut, and wags his head, and says Amen, every two-three minutes, all the time, to everythink. And another they call Happy Jack, as is always laughing, and he opens his mouth wide when they sing, but it 's all make-believe, for he can't sing a bit. They sent some cake all round last time I was i' th' Chapel; and a boy as sat alongside me give me a bite out of his damson tart, as he 'd got unbeknownt, ye know, under his hankercher, it was *so* good! You 'll come along with us, Tellno, now won't you?"

Whether it was the temptation of the doctrine hot and hot, or the cake and damson tart, it were safest perhaps not to enquire. But Tellno promised to go in.

Next day was Sunday. Comfort was a Churchwoman, and did not affect the Chapel, but she let Tellno go where he pleased, and after dinner he was lost for a time among the colliery lads. In the afternoon she went up to the Mansfield's to ask little Katie to come to tea.

When she opened the door of the back kitchen, there was a sound of preaching within, and one of the elder girls came out laughing as she said: "Katie 's giving it us all, and she 's allus so grave, that 's the fun ; but she 'll stop the instant you go in, so do 'ee wait here a bit."

Comfort could both see and hear from where she stood in the shadow. The child was standing on the kitchen table, raving, roaring, screaming, stamping her little feet, throwing her arms in the air, and opening them wide at the persuasive passages.

"Oh silly sheep, why don't you come to me," she cried, mopping her face with her pocket-handkerchief, according to her model. Then came a bit of a hymn,

"The Devil and me we can't agree,
For I hates him, and he hates me."

She had just reached the climax, the impassioned demand for a collection. "There, you that denies yourselves nothink! You women there with the "Burgundy crame" (rum) in your teas, and you can't afford so much as a sixpence for the work! Emanuel! Emanuel!" cried the little preacher suddenly, raising her arm and pointing her small finger at the imaginary listener, "wheriver is that sixpence as you owed to the plate as long ago as March last? I tell 'ee what, I'll have that there sixpence, with interest, if I die for it!" But at this moment, gazing sternly round upon her congregation in search of the defaulters, Katie caught sight of Comfort listening at the half-opened door, dropped off her table immediately, ran and hid herself, and could not be persuaded to utter a single word more. She did it all in perfect good faith. Her sisters were screaming with laughter; her mother sat and smiled by the fire; but her own gravity never relaxed—it was no joke to her. The sense of reproduction was strong in her, and she was simply following her instinct.

"I only dropped in," said Comfort, in her plaintive tones, "to ask if Katie could n't come to tea. Tellno 'ud be so

pleased to see his little sweetheart." But Katie was angry at having been caught: she was coy and obdurate; she punished herself, it is true, by not accepting the invitation, but, like some older women, she consoled herself that, at least, she was paining both Comfort, who offended her, and Tellno, who was only guilty of being very fond of her.

CHAPTER II.

"Have you seen owt o' Tellno?" said Comfort, coming into the Mansfield's on the following Saturday. He said he 'd be here for certain sure by now, as we was to goo and get a new jacket for him at the shop, and he 's such a one for keeping his word."

"He have n't a been here," replied Mrs. Mansfield. "And as to keeping his word, they do say up i' th' pit as how he got into a scrape this week for *not* doing of it. 'T was something about a lamp as he were to get ready, and he broke it, and then hid it away, and told a lie for to screen himself. I don't know the rights o' th' story, but that 's what Tom says" (Tom was her son, and clerk at the colliery); "an' as how it 'll stand a black mark agin his name. 'T is a pity to gie a boy such a name, as folk takes the more notice if there 's anything goos amiss."

"They may tak' as much notice as they pleases along o' my boy," said Comfort, roused out of her usual meek endurance. Tellno 's the truest boy all the country round, and has been iver sin' he was a babby; that 's what I 'll certify to my dyin' day.

"Well, well, I daresay it 's all right; but mothers is n't the best judges allus o' what their children does and says," said Mrs. Mansfield, shortly.

Meantime Tellno had gone up to High Turnal Common to get the blackberries which he had promised to little Katie. He scrambled down into the sunken part, shut off

from the rest, where the fruit had not been rifled by the spoilers in general, and his basket was soon nearly full ; but at last, stretching forward after some peculiarly fine clusters in the thick brushwood, he suddenly found himself sinking down, down into what had been the opening to an ancient mine. He fell upon some rotten woodwork, which gave way under his weight, but not before he had been able to scramble on to a narrow ledge at the side, where there was just room for an uneasy perch. He looked round the earth arched over his head, and it was impossible for him to hoist himself out of the hole without help. Below him, the water filled the shaft to an unknown depth, and it looked black and ominous and terrible to the boy. He began to call loudly, but the earth seemed to muffle his cries, and it was very unlikely that anyone would be passing near that retired spot at such a time in the evening. Still he went on calling desperately, till his voice died away in a sort of inarticulate howl. All the wrong things he had done seemed to come into his head, and the good words that his memory was in search of appeared to slip through, and he could not catch them. "Lord, help me, or I die," the burden of one of the Psalms, which he had heard sung on Sunday, was the only thing that came back to him. "Lord, help me ; Lord, save me, and take me out of this horrible pit," repeated he, in an agony. For a moment it seemed to calm him, and he suddenly recollected that he had put a tin whistle into his pocket in the morning. It was with almost a transport of delight that he sounded it loud and shrill. The piercing note was heard much farther than his unassisted voice ; but still no one answered, and at the end of another half-hour Tellno began to despair. He examined the place all round once more, but it was quite impossible to try and climb out. The earth over his head reached up to the opening, beneath which lay the abyss of water, with no treadhold anywhere from which to hoist himself up. The darkness increased. He could see a little star in the bit of sky just above him, and it seemed company

for him; but the cold now struck him to the marrow of his bones. He had no heart to go on calling, but he still sounded his whistle, as loud as he could, every three or four minutes. At length, leaning forward to try and direct the sound through the mouth of the hole, his numbed fingers lost hold of the whistle, and it fell with a splash into the sullen water, which closed over it with what seemed to him an ugly bite. The boy's heart died within him—it was like the death of all hope.

At this moment, there was a little cry on the bank above. A child's voice went on repeating, "Tellno, Tellno Lyes, where are ye?" It was Katie's, he felt sure.

"Here, here!" he shouted, "I 'm down this black pit." Then, recollecting himself, he cried even more loudly, almost fiercely, "Stop, Katie, stop where ye be, dunna come nigh me, you 'll slip into th' hole, and be drowned." And as he heard, by the rustling in the bushes, that the adventurous little soul was trying to get down to him, he called again, "Go back, that 's a darlin', and axe * 'em to bring a rope, for to hoist me out o' this black death—that 'll help most!"

There was no more sound; everything became once more silent as the night. For a few moments Tellno felt as if he had been mistaken, and had imagined a voice; but his faith in Katie was strong. He was sure she would not forsake him. Yet it seemed to him like hours before help arrived.

Two men came scrambling down through the brambles to the place where his cries were now heard. The air in the pit was very foul, and he had not strength to put the rope round him, but one man let down the other, who fastened it round the boy.

"You 're not leaving me, Amos?" he gasped, as the man was drawn up to the surface with the rope in his hand.

* Clark, writing to Cardinal Wolsey of an interview with Cardinal Colonne, says: "I made so bould to axe him." 1521.

"Nay lad, not if I knows it," answered Amos Deane, cheerily.

When Tellno at last reached the open air he nearly fainted, and they carried him to the upper ground, where his mother, with Katie in her arms, was craning for a sight over the dark tangle.

"Thank God, thank God for my boy," she repeated, as she poured some brandy down his throat, "and you, too, as saved him," she added to the men.

"You may thank yon little maid, too, for saving of his life," said Joshua, warmly. "He could n't ha' lived in that there hole for very long, I take it."

"However did you think, child, of coming here for to seek him?" said one of her sisters, who had joined the little crowd which always collects round an accident.

"I minded me as how he 'd promised to get me the blackberries this Saturday," whispered the child, "an' he 's such a one for keeping his word." She was very white and trembling as she clung round Comfort's neck.

CHAPTER III.

TELLNO had a Sunday to recover himself in, and was all right for his work on Monday; but poor little Katie was ill for several days with the excitement of the rescue.

"Thou 'st been in trouble, my lad," said Comfort, as she and her boy sat over the fire together that evening. "What 's this about a broken lamp? Thou didstna tell thee mother."

"There were nowt to tell; I didna break the lamp, an' I telled no lie, an' some one must have been after mischief for to lay it at my door. Thou 'st cumber enough, little mother, wi'out my telling things to fash thee."

"As long as thou 'st not to blame, child, I can bear

it; but 't is hard for thee to lose thy good name, wi'out cause, too."

"I 'll win it back again," said Tellno, sturdily.

Things went on at the pit for a few weeks smoothly, and, as the son of the late carter, Tellno was in hopes that he might be put into the underground stables, where the ponies lived in a great loose box cut out of the live coal, and never came to the world above until they died. It was the great object of his ambition, as of Simon, and the other boys below. There were eighteen or twenty ponies, who did much of the work carried on by a steam-engine in greater mines. The lines of laden trucks went down by their own weight on an endless chain, which brought up the empty ones; but when there was a difference of level in the coal seams, the ponies dragged the trucks up the inclines.

The equable heat, often above 80°, makes their coats as soft as floss silk, and they are well fed, and look sleek and happy. The stable pen was, however, nearly empty when Tellno arrived, and the ponies were almost all at work excepting a personal friend of his own, for some inscrutable reason called "Tommy Dodd." He was very clever and very wicked, and, therefore, a great pet in the underground world. Tellno had been sent to take a couple of planks and a bag of nails and screws to the carpenter, who had gone down to mend a weak place in the boarding, due to "Tommy Dodd's" kicks in his persistent efforts to get out; but there was no one there. The carpenter was still at dinner. Tellno put down his load, and began to talk to "Tommy" over the half-door, scratching his nose and stroking his neck. "Ayn't you a beauty" he was saying, admiringly, as Amos Deane came up and stood watching them.

"Thou 'll be getting into the stables yet, my lad, thou 'st good to dumb beasts," he said kindly, as the pony rubbed his head lovingly against the boy.

"He is a knowing old chap, that he is," answered

Tellno, as Amos passed on. His time was up. He looked to the lower latch, and buttoned the upper door carefully from the outside, to prevent "Tommy's" opening it, and went on his way.

The next thing he heard was that the pony had got out, had put his foot on the bag of nails, and lamed himself badly.

"An' thee mun have left the door open, else how could him win his way out," cried the overseer, angrily. "Amos Deane seen thee playing with "Tommy" not five minutes before."

"But I never opened the door, and I buttoned the window half tight. I warn't there a minute after," said Tellno, anxiously.

"Now what 's the use of shirking like that!" replied the man. "It is n't so long sin, that story o' th' lamps, and ye telled a lie there. Ye 'ud best just say ye had forgotten the latch, ten times over. Ye won't get into the stables, ye may be certain sure o' that, if there 's doings like this."

"But if I have n't lied?" cried Tellno, vehemently.

The overseer had gone on, however, without listening any further.

There was a grinning face that day as he came out of the pit. "Seems as it ayn't so very easy for to tell the truth, Master Tellno," said Simon jeeringly.

On the Sunday afternoon, Amos Deane came down to Comfort's cottage, and as he sat smoking by the fire, he said, between the whiffs of his pipe: "We be a takin' a piece of coal work by contrac, me an' Joshua, an' Seth Flint for the third—he 's a strong chap an' can work, though he do drink precious hard, to be sure. We shall want a boy, an' I 've a thought of thee, Tellno, an' I 've spoke to manager for to let thee goo wi' us, for I believe none o' th' bad tales agin thee, that I don't. He said thou mightest come, but that we mun be careful thee didstna serve us some trick afore we parted."

Tellno's face glowed; he cared even more for the good

proof of confidence than for the delightful prospect of promotion and pay. It seemed as if all things now would come right, even the care of the ponies might be compassed later.

When the day arrived for the contract to begin, he started early for the works. As he came up the hill a great crowd of men was just melting away from the place where a dog fight had been going on. Almost every collier in these districts has a dog; some to fight and some to run, and these are fed upon the fat of the land, often to the great diminution of the food of the family. A mutton chop is no uncommon meal for a highly respected performer.

As Tellno passed, he heard his new mate, Seth Flint, one of the most eager of the dog fanciers, shouting in a furious state of wrath—he had been betting, and had lost his money upon one of the dogs—

"I may ha' lost this turn, bad luck to ye, but see what the bitch will do o' Wednesday se'nnight! and then ye 'll know a thing or two more, an' be a bit wiser nor ye seems now!" He swore fiercely as he prepared to go up to the pit, muttering to himself, as he passed Tellno without a word, with his hands deep in his empty pockets.

The contract work went on prosperously; the coal was of good quality, and got out without much labour. The men were in high spirits; the seam was here about five feet deep, so that the stooping to work was not so great as in some places, and the confined space less trying. But there came a day when alarming cracks on the upper part of the seam, and in the stone above, appeared to Amos' critical eye—"I dunna like the looks on it," said he, anxiously, "'t will be a fault I reckon, and then who can tell whether it mun be up or down the seam will goo?"

There is not seldom a shift in the strata caused by some ancient convulsion of nature throwing up or down the whole lie of the rocks, shattering, crumbling them in every direction, and making the roof and sides utterly unsafe, and all progress for the time impossible.

"Run, lad," said Joshua, and get some pit props, and send up word to manager about it all."

Tellno scrambled out as fast as he could. He had reached the wider way where the props were to be found, when he saw some one before him.

"Run and give notice to manager, as how the ruf 's falling in," he cried, hardly noticing in the little light that it was Simon to whom he spoke; then seizing the pieces of fir wood he rushed, or rather crawled, back to the dangerous spot. Almost before he could reach the mouth where the narrow passage of the new work opened into the wider way, the roof of coal and stone fell in along many yards, blocking all further ingress. The boy was caught by the foot, and a piece fell on his side, while the three men were imprisoned far within—the horrible fate of being buried alive.

Tellno could neither stir nor make himself heard, and no help came from above. At length the dull sound brought up colliers from other parts of the mine.

"What! thee hast na seen nobody," said they.

"I sent word by Simon, ages ago. Is no help come from the shaft?" groaned the boy.

"Nobody's heerd as nowt has happened," was the answer.

As soon as the accident was known, however, on the surface, a whole crowd of volunteers offered themselves to dig out the prisoners, and the men were down at the place almost before it seemed possible to reach it. The danger was great, the roof was in such a shaky, uncertain state that great lumps of coal and rock were falling in all directions, and threatening to bury or maim the workers. The pit was an old one, the ventilation was bad, the heat was intense, the place was too narrow for more than one or two at most to work, but the rescuers hewed away with their picks, and dug out the loose pieces with their spades in the low, confined, dark, dripping passage far in the bowels of the earth, one man succeeding the other as each in turn became exhausted with the severe toil under pressure of time.

The contrast between the dog fighting, rough, drinking side of the men, and their devotion to such painful labour in the simplicity of heroism was very striking. It was slow work, and the constrained position, with scarcely an inch of room to spare on any side of them, made it the more trying, while the anxious, dispiriting doubts whether their efforts might not after all be in vain, and their comrades dead before they could be reached, never for a moment made them relax their efforts. The quiet self-sacrifice was entirely without reward of fame. These nameless heroes were working on in the dark stifling mine, in the wet and the discomforts of all kinds, with no one to thank them or to praise them.

"The soul of goodness in things evil" was more than touching—it was beautiful. It was not only the sense of duty, though duty is a grand thing; it was a chivalrous sacrifice for their mates, not counting the cost for themselves, laying down if necessary their lives for their friends, sometimes for mere strangers.

"Is it your brother, who is buried down there?" said the parson to a man emerging from the shaft, black, reeking and weary.

"Blessee! why I never set eyes upon him in my life!" was the answer.

Tellno's foot was disengaged gently and tenderly, and he was carried up to the surface, and down to his mother's cottage as soon as possible, closely followed by the doctor.

"We must have it off," he said, examining the maimed and crushed member.

The blessing of chloroform was not to be had, but the boy was in a sort of stupor, and when he awoke the foot was gone.

"You must keep him quiet, it 's as much as his life."

There was no lack of offers to sit up with him; to help to nurse, to wash, none are so ready to give their time, their labour, their care, as women who have been toiling hard all day, and need their rest for the morrow. The boy had a

very unquiet night, but fell asleep towards morning. It was all very well, however, for the doctor to order rest and silence, on that Tuesday afternoon. Reports of progress came in every hour at least from some small, excited, flying post, and Comfort did not know how to keep them back from her boy—scarcely even desired it.

"Johnny Dobbs is certain sure," said one, "as he heerd a little knocking, but Sammy said it warn't nought but the cracking of the falling coal, and he 'd swear to it."

"They 've a dug out better 'n seventeen feet, but, Tellno, thou say'st as how Amos and the rest be a matter of twelve or fourteen yards farther in, and the men canna' get on fast, with th' roof so chancy, an' as mun be shored up every yard or so."

"It *were* hot in there to day—Tommy Duckett came out streaming with sweat—and scarce air eno' for a fly. Wer'n't he mucky, just."

On the second night, however, it was no longer doubtful that there were muffled sounds of life.

"They 're not dead anyhow!" said one hard looking fellow coming out after his turn was over, his face shining with the delight of the good news; "they was singin' a psalm, I could hear the toon quite plain, 'Hold the fort for I am coming,' but they could n't keep it up many minutes, poor chaps!" And the man drew a hard hand across his eyes.

At length, after the second day was well on, the three men were brought "to grass." As Amos was laid gasping on the ground near the pit's mouth, they heard him mutter, "Has t' brought me through the valley of the shadow of death!"

"What day is it?" he said presently.

"'T is Wednesday; ye 've a been in best part o' two nights and two days," was the reply.

"'T *were* a long while, indeed," sighed poor Joshua, whose leg had been broken and his shoulder crushed;

"none but God A'mighty can tell how long 't were ! And me not able to stir scarce so much as my little finger."

"Wednesday !" cried Seth Flint sharply, as he revived. "Have the bitch won ? 'T was her day yesterday."

A few days after Mrs. Flint herself came down to see Tellno, and tell the tale of her husband's escape. Tellno was dozing, and she sat down by the fire with Comfort, and prosed on at exceeding length on all that had, and more that had not, happened.

"He says, says he," and "I says," "they says," over and over again.

"I hope as how 't will be a warnin' to Seth," said Comfort at last, "that he won't drink so bad, nor beat thee a Saturday night so often."

(There is money on which to get drunk on pay nights, which are generally, therefore, lively times at the pits.)

"Not beat me !" cried Mrs. Flint loudly. "Why, I should think as how he 'd a took up with some other 'ooman if he did n't lay on when he 's in liquor."

Tellno was not the better for all this excitement, and was restless and full of pain.

"Surely little Katie will come to me," he said anxiously.

The child, as so often happens, had a sort of fear of the sick, and a horror of the idea of a limb cut off. "What ! with a big knife, mother ? " and it was several days before she could be persuaded to go near him. At last she arrived, dragging in a little round table with three legs.

"I made it myself, Tellno, in the joiner's shop," said she.

"Oh, Katie, surely not you !"

"Yes," she replied, "I stuck in the legs with the glue (father helping of me, ye know), an ye see it wer' n't a table at all till it had got its legs on ; so ye know I *did* make the table," insisted the little casuist decidedly.

"I shall bring dolly to see thee," she went on. "Mary hâv' n't but one fut now ; me and Tom cutted off the other with father's chisel ; and how her did squeal *to* be sure ! Did you squeal, Tellno !"

"Nay, I think not ; but I 'm very bad, Katie."

"Mother says as how ye 're not so bad as ye think for, and as how Comfort did allus worrit so about thee feyther, and she makes as much fuss about thee now. She says as how once a bear come round—only think ! wi' a man to him to make him dance (how I do wish they 'd come now!) an' the folks all standing round—an' man says to bear, 'you go up to the 'ooman as winna tak' her tea till her maister comes from the mine ;' an' bear comes up straight to thee mother, what was at her door. How did bear know she was so fretting, Tellno, d' ye think ?" she said in a low awe-struck tone.

"Bear didna know, but man did," said Tellno, smiling, "an' then mother gied him a penny for 't, I 'll be bound."

"Tell me," said the child, jumping on the bed, "'bout 'Tommy Dodd,' an' how he puts down his head first a one side and then t' other, for to hearken for the rope breakin', an' him to run away, an' how he opens the door wi' his nose and lets out all the ponies !"

She did not require much telling, for she remembered every syllable, but she liked to hear it over and over again, in exactly the same words. "I 'm too tired to talk to-day, Katie," answered Tellno, wearily—"thee mun come again another time."

"Thou 'llt mak' haste an' get well, an' come out to play with me. I mun go home an' look after dolly's fut. Her 'll want her supper," replied Katie, hurrying out after her important affairs.

"Mother," said the boy, waking out of an uneasy sleep a few days after, "I want thee sorely to go up to th' manager, and see him thine own self, and say as how I telled no lies, and didna break the lamp, nor forgit to see to the latches—the ponies was all right when I left 'em. And I sent word about the falling in o' th' roof—stands to reason I did. Why, who 'ud it harm so much as me? It hurts me sore to think as they should lay sich things to my door."

Comfort went up next morning to Mr. Harrison's office.

"If you please, sir, and it ayn't not axing too much, wi' all this sad work goin' on i' th' pit, could you come down and speak to my boy—he 's fretting sore, and it thwarts him from getting better, it does, that he should be thowt to tell so many untruths, and to seek to hurt the pony, which he quite do love no end, that there 'Tommy Dodd,' he does. If you 'll b'lieve me, sir, I think as summun' has a spite agin him, and wants for to git the place an' drive him out."

"It 's always sure to be only because somebody has a grudge against somebody else when anything goes wrong," answered the manager, smiling. But he went down at the earliest opportunity to the cottage.

"Well, my lad, so you 're going on pretty well, I hear, and the doctor says if you will but keep more quiet you 'll be on your crutches before very long."

"Sir," said the boy, lifting up his pale face from the pillow, "if you 'd be so kind as to ax and to enquire, I think you 'll find as I 've done nowt amiss these two times; there 's summun' behindbacks as wants to do me a mischief, for certain sure; just you ax Amos Deane, he 'd justify me, I know he will."

"I 'll enquire," said the manager kindly; but when he returned to the office there was a press of business, important matters that must be settled immediately, with regard to the slip of coal—work which could not be delayed—and it was hardly to be wondered at if, for the time, the boy's troubles slipped out of the great man's memory.

Tellno grew weaker instead of stronger—the leg was healing rightly; but there must have been some injury in the side where the lump of coal had fallen. He grew more and more depressed at the prospect before him of earning a livelihood in his maimed condition.

"And who 'll earn the wage for little mother, what my daddy left me to see to and do for," sobbed the boy, hiding his white face on her shoulder one day as she sat by him.

"And may-be Katie will not care to marry me when I 've got but one fut," he moaned mournfully.

"She 'll be no true woman, then, for such a thing to stand in the way of true love," said his mother indignantly. "Don't you tell me that of her, and thou shalt be fine and grand yet, thou 'll see, and soon too. Parson comes to me to-day, when thou wast asleep, and says, says he, 'Comfort, my woman,' he says, very kind, 'Tellno's a bit of a schollard, and he mun just stick to his books, and squire 'll help him at the Grammar School, and we 'll make a clerk on him.'"

"I dunna think I shall live to be a clerk," said Tellno, sadly.

"What, not up at the works, like Mr. Tom," answered his mother, encouragingly.

The boy smiled at the magnificent prospect, but said nothing. He was very patient, and saved his mother all that was possible, never rousing her when she had fallen for a few minutes asleep, but he repeated anxiously, day after day, "Thee hastna heard nowt from Mr. Harrison?"

"He is so busy with all this trouble and work in the mine, but he 'll surely send sometime," answered his mother, soothingly. But the days went on, and the boy's little strength oozed away.

Christmas came, and one night Comfort was roused out of a doze by Tellno's voice—"Listen, mother, to the music," said he.

"I canna hear nowt," said she, "but perhaps 't is the waits."

"Don't ye hear, don't ye hear?" cried the boy, "'t is the angels singing! How beautiful 't is to be sure! I think 't is my feyther as has axed them up there for to send me the music that I may n't be feared passing through the river."

"Thou 'st not going to leave me, Tellno," cried poor Comfort, in an agonized whisper.

"Nay, dear, but I 'm sent for," answered he, "dunna try for to keep me so sore. Seems as if I couldna die, thee pulling of me back so hard."

And the mother made her last sacrifice, and gave up even allowing herself to wish, in order to make the parting easier for him. She never uttered another word of grief, or shed a tear, and her cheerful face over the bed gave him peace and rest as he gazed up into her face with a longing look, which would have half broken her heart if she could have remembered to think of herself in the full tide of her love.

At midnight came the waits from the village.

"Stop 'em, mother, if ye can," said Tellno, "they sound so harsh, and I canna hear the other music, them singing so."*

When Comfort returned, the boy had sunk into a doze, and at four o'clock all was still. He parted at the turning of the tide.

"Have ye heerd as how the poor boy, Tellno's, gone?" said the overseer to Mr. Harrison.

The manager struck his closed fist on the table. "And there I forgot all about the poor boy's troubles! But surely I 'll see and right him now if I can. Was there anyone do you think who might have had a spite against him?"

"Nobody, as I knows on."

"Who brought you the tales of the lies and scrapes?"

"That long-legged lad, Simon, as never come up to tell when the roof fell in, as Tellno said that he sent word, but went loiterin' and lingerin' till I heerd noise mysen."

"Tell him to come to me," said Mr. Harrison, shortly.

"How was it you did not run at once and speak when the accident happened?" said he, quietly, when the lad came in.

"That Tellno never telled me a word about it; 't were just one more of his lies; he telled a many of them," said Simon, sulkily.

"What were the lies about?" said the manager.

* QUEEN KATHERINE—"Saw you not the blessed troop. . . . Bid the music leave, they are harsh and heavy to me."

"First he broke a lamp, an' I found it where he hid it away."

"You saw him break it?"

"Nay," said Simon, angrily.

"But you saw him hide it?"

"Nay."

"Then how the deuce did you know that he broke it?"

"There were no one else could ha' done it, no one come by but him an' me, an' 't were so dark that I couldna see my hand."

"Him and me, and so dark that you could see nothing."

Simon was puzzled at Mr. Harrison's manner; it was very quiet but a little stern, and it troubled him as he strove to understand what the master was after.

"And how about the ponies?"

"I were just behind him, that 's Tellno, but he niver seen me," cried Simon exultingly, "and there I fun' the latches all left undone where he 'd a been playin' wi' 'Tommy.' Amos saw him!"

"The pony was n't gone yet?" observed the manager, negligently turning over some papers.

"Nay, there hadna been time, I were so quick," answered Simon eagerly. "And there the bag o' nails hung to the door where he 'd left it, and mun ha' fell off as the pony come out and him to tread on 'em."

"What! on purpose to hurt him?" said Mr. Harrison.

"Can't say, I 'm sure, what he thowt nor wished—he were a deep one, Tellno were."

"Now, Simon, you may go," said the manager, rising.

"You 've been telling lies as thick as the nails on your boots. Don't you see that if you found Tellno had left the latches open, and the pony was still in the stall, you 'd nothing to do but fasten them up, and no mischief could come. Either you left them open to harm him, or you opened them yourself. As to the lamp, I don't believe a word about it. If it was so dark you could n't see your hand, how could you identify Tellno? Probably you broke

it yourself." Simon's deep-set eyes gloured, and his hands twisted, but he said nothing. "You 've made the poor boy's life a burden to him with your lies and your accusations. We 've had enow of you. Just clear out of the pit directly—there 's no room for you here."

He went himself down to Comfort's cottage.

"I 've come to tell you myself, Mrs. Lyes, that it 's all quite right about Tellno. He seems to have been as good a lad, and as truth-telling, as any we have in the pits."

"Ye din'na think as I needed no one to tell me that," answered poor Comfort, queenly, in her sorrow. "Did ye fancy I didna know it just as well afore ye come? 'T would ha' smoothed his path that 's gone if he could ha' knowed his name were righted; but as for me, I were na' surer as the sun be as that he were a' right in the heaven. But *he* wished it, so I 'm glad the rest on 'em should know; and I thanks you kindly, sir, I thanks you very kindly," she added, with unconscious dignity, "and it might be put upo' my boy's tombstone as he "telled no lies!"

DULCIE DUNNE.

DULCIE DUNNE.

CHAPTER I.

THE great sweeps of chalk downs which form so large a part of our southern counties have a very marked character of their own; the mighty waves of country rise and fall, with here and there a white scarped side of cliff, reminding one strongly of that sea which once rolled over them. I had not long been married, and it was my first visit to an old friend of my husband's, who lived at the foot of one of the rounded grey-green hills of the range.

We were riding rapidly that spring day over the short, scanty grass, with its peculiar flowers—little yellow pansies, blue chicory (I even caught sight of a bee orchis)—the larks rose and sang high over our heads in the brisk, bright air; vistas of soft grassy grey hillsides, folding over each other, opened far away towards the distant sea, with occasional beech forests on the nearer slopes. Such a country as Copley Fielding loved to paint.

It was beautiful galloping ground, and the horses seemed to like it as much as the riders. Down one steep slope we scrambled and up another, and then along the crest of a third; the rare sight of a living being—a lonely shepherd with his flock—their shadows lengthening on the hillside portentously, or two horses before a cart slowly following the solitary driver on their way home, loomed large against the sky as if they belonged to a race of giants.

“And then to think of the hundreds of miles of such chalk downs that are being laid down in the deep bed of the Atlantic at the present moment,” said our old host, meditatively, who was versed in such matters. “The

millions of billions of small globular jelly-fish who are tranquilly depositing their little corpses in the quiet still depths to make the future hills."

"I only hope when they have their turn and come up to the light of day, that the edition of men and women who will then ride over them will enjoy themselves as much as we are doing to-day!" said my husband.

In winter the downs are bleak and bare to a degree, the wind sweeps over them with a bitter, biting blast; but in this pleasant spring day nothing could be more exhilarating than the draughts of pure air, which we inhaled with double zest, as coming from under the dun cloud which an east wind brings over London.

We were bound to a line of very ancient yews, which looked black and funereal on the top of a ridge, stretching for more than a mile, old, worn, and torn by wind and weather in their exposed position, which led up to a sort of mound or cairn—believed to mark the grave of one of the old marauding sea-kings. It looked far over hill and dale, woodland and field, touched in pale blue and lilac hues the straight line of the sea, with its pearly whiteness shining beyond, and bounding the whole in the distance. It was so solitary, so high above the world, that one felt the poetry of the savage old race as very real who had fixed on such a spot, alone with the bare down and the sky, for their hero's last home. He had probably been slain in some inland raid, but they had found him a resting place where he could still look out on his beloved element, at least afar off. He would certainly rest the better in his people's eyes for that bright glimpse, and for the sense of room and fresh air, while the larks were springing, soaring, and singing, vanishing high aloft out of our sight in the sunshine, and then falling like a shot into their low-lying nests all around him.

My companions had a further quest, and, with the return ride before us, I looked longingly down into a little "combe," the circular head to a valley, which ran far up

into the heart of the hill, almost at our feet. A small, low farmhouse, a mere cottage in size, lay near the bottom, almost as solitary a home as the cairn itself above. The deep red-tiled sloping roof, reaching almost to the ground, was touched with brilliant yellow lichen, and the thatch of the still smaller barns and cowsheds, green with moss, were crowned with great lumps of houseleek. A little orchard ran round one side of the oasis of cultivation to a bit of bright green corn-field on the lower ground, where the rains had carried the scanty soil, and the land was richer.

"They 'll make you very welcome at Alice Holt," said our old host, "and will put up the pony in their shed for you. They 're as good, respectable, thrifty people as we have about. It 's a little 'take,' as we call it in these parts, ten or twelve acres, almost too small for a farm; the people have had it for generations. They eke it out with day labour, but it is thought a more dignified life than a cottager's, though I doubt whether they are really at all better off."

I would not let my companions stop for me, as they had only just time for their further ride, and, leading my pony down the steep hillside, among great tufts of flowering gorse bushes, scenting the air delicately with the fragrance of their brilliant bosses of bloom, I came straight upon the back of the little island of a homestead on the bare chalk down. Looking over a gap in the fence of the orchard, I saw a child, between two and three years old, sitting placidly all alone among the buttercups and daisies, amusing herself with making "posies," while a shower of pink and white apple blossoms had fallen round and upon her from the gnarled old fruit trees over her head. A number of birds and beasts were walking busily about, minding their own business and not attending to her—a hen clucking importantly to the suite of little chickens in her rear, a couple of ducks quacking over a big slug, a calf tethered by a rope, and a prowling cat.

"What 's your name, dear?" said I, hanging over the

wicket gate, with the bridle in my hand, and struck with her extreme beauty.

"Little Dulcie Dunne," she lisped in a very low whisper, lifting up a pair of large soft grey eyes to my face very seriously, but without any fear or even shyness, although strangers must have been rare at Alice Holt.

At that moment a pleasant-faced, active-looking woman appeared at the back door of the house, and came hospitably forward. She looked old to be the mother of such a little gem as Dulcie.

"I seen you on the top o' the down wi' the old squire," said she, smiling. "Shan't I hang up the nag? It 's but a poor place, but he 'll be safe agin you 're ready. Will you please for to walk forward and take a drink o' mead," she added kindly, when, after having disposed of the pony, we all went together into the house. The kitchen looked much more warm and inviting, but manners required us to go into the little stuffy parlour, where the windows had probably never been opened since they were put in, and I had to breathe through the open door. Dulcie sat on her mother's lap, looking at me gravely with her great grey eyes under the long bright brown hair, which was carefully put back from her face with a round comb.

"I were ironing to-day," said her mother, "and Dulcie's a good little maid; she don't give a bit o' trouble, and there she just goes about when I 'm busy and looks after herself out in the orchat or where there 's flowers. She 's a silly little goose, aynt she? as were trying for to catch the sunshine this mornin' upo' the floor as came in at the kitchen winders and played so pretty after a shower," and she stroked the child's head fondly. "She 's the youngest o' seven. My eldest son he be fower-and-twenty, and he 's doin' well in a shop at Hampton; and my daughter Jane she be at service; and the next she 's apprenticed to a milliner. And then comes the three boys, and the youngest on 'em fourteen. I did hope we 'd pretty nigh done wi' them, when then came Dulcie! But there, though they

brings a deal o' trouble, they brings a deal o' love wi' 'em, and her brothers and all they do conceit greatly o' she, and can't make enow o' her ; and my master he do make no end o' fuss for her, enough for a dozen, I tells him, laughing like, by times, and she not a bit o' good at all." And she smiled as she pressed the beautiful little soft burden very close to her.

" Perhaps 't was pretty to form together
Words and thoughts unlike each other."

Dulcie was very quiet, and made no response to my advances, though she allowed me to play with her and hold her little pink-tipped fingers in mine. She studied my face, and I was glad when she apparently made no objection to what she saw there ; the unbiassed judgment of children and dogs is always valuable. She permitted my caresses with a certain gracious gravity, but I did not win a single smile. Perhaps she was a little sleepy ! She went to bed when the birds did, and there were sounds of retiring now among the chickens in the orchard.

When at last we were hailed by the returning riders, she put her hand confidingly, however, in mine, and we went out together, first to fetch the pony, and then to make acquaintance with the two horsemen, who had dismounted to help me to my seat. Mrs. Dunne had taken the opportunity for a little talk with her landlord about the broken fence.

" If so be you 'd be so kind as to have it seed to, Squire, as the calf's no end o' foolish after the vetches, and my master he says we shall ha' a' the shep into the growing corn some fine mornin', and we 've got forty save one now on the downs ! "

" What a beautiful child ! " said both my companions, as we rode away with a parting greeting to the pair who stood watching us in the sunset light. It just touched the baby's little red handkerchief crossed over her breast, and the deep blue of her mother's stiff gown, with a background

of pearly grey hillside and pale yellow charlock in the meadow below.

"Little Dulcie Dunne! such a suitable name for that sweet little morsel," said I, repeating the pretty alliteration.

"The English ear has always loved alliteration, as you may see from the days of *Piers Plowman* downwards," observed our host. "There are not better people about than the Dunnes, and the children turn out as well as their parents, which is not always the case. I wish we'd more such. And they manage to send them one after the other to school, far as it is, and across a stream where there's often a flood, and a long plank bridge. But folk are always more regular and prize education more where there's a little difficulty! Thrifty, upright, independent, good-hearted people. I'm fond of the little takes, though they cost sadly more than the rent in out-buildings, as Caird is always telling me," laughed the Squire, who stood rather in awe of his Scotch steward. We paid but one more visit to the pleasant home on the edge of the chalk downs, when we rode over to Dulcie and her mother once more. And then our kindly old host died, a new dynasty reigned in his stead, and we lost sight of that part of the world and its inhabitants altogether.

CHAPTER II.

It was many years after, when one morning I was calling on an old lady in London, the last remaining sister of our host of that day, and a connection of our own, that, as I entered, a girl with her eyes full of tears went hurriedly out of the room.

"What a charming face!" said I to my old friend.

"And she's as good as she is pretty," replied she; "but she's doing a very foolish thing, I'm afraid. She's very young, and she's bent on marrying a young servant of my

nephew's, who 's not much older than herself, and hardly worthy of my Dulcie."

"Dulcie!" cried I, "Dulcie Dunne, my little beauty of the chalk downs?"

"She comes from the dear old chalk downs, certainly, and her name is Dunne; and now I think of it, she has a tender recollection of some lady who once sent her a picture book, and a little red petticoat—was that you?"

"But tell me about the bridegroom," enquired I, with interest; "he is a very fortunate man to win such a pearl as Dulcie."

"I believe there is no harm in him," answered the old lady. "He is a good-tempered, good-looking, good-natured fellow, they say, but he was persuaded once to take a little too much, and my nephew is very particular, and said he must leave. I wish you would speak to her yourself; she may think that I am an interested party, which is quite true, for I can't bear losing her, she is so much handier than most girls. I can't think where the good servants are all gone to in these days! Couldn't you just ask her to put off her marriage a little while, till they 're both older, or at least till his steadiness has been tried a little longer?"

I was not very willing to interfere, but she insisted, and it is difficult to refuse the requests of eighty-two.

"So you are going to be married, Dulcie," said I next day when we had renewed our acquaintance. "I hope you 're pretty certain that 'he' will be steady. You 're full young to begin life already, both of you, are you not?"

There was a fitful blush and a trembling of the lips as she lifted her beautiful eyes full of tears to mine, very touching in a would-be bride, but without the entire confidence, I thought, which is usual in the species.

"There 's been a deal made of very little," she answered, eagerly; "it was only once Edward went wrong, and then they over-persuaded him. Such a little turns his head, and then he 's all one as if he 'd supped and soaked for years, like so many of them do."

"But surely, if that's the case, he ought to take care about the 'little,' just as if it were a whole barrel of spirits, Dulcie," I tried to say sagely, according to my brief.

"I've knowed him ever sin' we went to school together; he were a biggish lad, and I were a little un," she went on, hurriedly, quitting the painful subject in hand, "and he'd help me across the long plank bridge when the floods was out. And mother'd trust him to bring me to the foot of the Holt, she did. And please God, I'd rather be unhappy with Edward than ever so well doing with anybody else, be they who they may," she cried, kindling. "And his mother's dead; he was ever good to she, and kep' her to the end without the parish, and if he's tempted to the liquor I should be by to help. He's nobody now to care for him but me, he says, now his sister's dead, too. And he's very handy, and brought up respectable, and never ill-used nothing nor nobody, but was kind to the very dogs and the little uns, ever sin' he were a little un hisself." Her native *patois* returned with the picture of old days.

What could I say more? It was not a matter for friends and bystanders and well-wishers to interfere in. Dulcie had fully considered, she knew her own mind thoroughly, and was as steady as a rock.

The marriage took place soon after, I heard; her mistress, my old friend, contributing the wedding gown and the wedding dinner. The pair went off to a quiet place in the country a long way off, and all seemed to prosper with them, I was told.

Four or five years afterwards we found Edward Derby and his belongings transferred as factotum to the Rectory house, to a connection of our own, who had only just come into his living. He was delighted with his new servant, he was so intelligent, handy, and willing. He had worked as hard at hanging pictures and moving furniture, at fitting, carrying, and arranging, and all the thousand and one jobs concerned with taking root, as if all had been his own property. He was very fond of his master and his master's

family, and feared no trouble. He received us as old friends of his wife's, and his whole appearance was so remarkably respectable, likely looking, and trustworthy, that I did not wonder at the position he evidently held in the household.

I went to see Dulcie in her pleasant home in a lane close to the park gate—she was washing, and the sleeves were turned up from her large, shapely arms. She was a true-born lady, and quite as little discomposed as if sitting in her Sunday best. She knew that I knew that washing was an excellent and necessary performance; she made no foolish excuses, but set my chair with her grave, dignified welcome, quietly pulled down her sleeves and put on a clean apron, while she went on talking affectionately. I thought that I had never seen so handsome a woman, her grand, calm, regular features reminded one of Juno in the Ludovici palace: the well-formed head was set on her shoulders with a sort of Greek grace and power combined. Her nature was expressed by her outside, which is by no means always the case: the soul seems very often to have got into an unfortunately wrong body—a hero in spirit is shut up in a little crooked, deformed carcase, while six feet of handsome flesh and blood has nothing at all inside its sheath.

"It is a great pleasure to see you all so comfortable, and that Edward is doing so well," said I, smiling.

I could not quite make out whether her slow answer was from her delicate reticence, not liking to discuss her husband, even in a friendly way, or whether there were any doubt in her mind of the fair continuance of the well-doing; but I could ask no questions when she did not encourage them.

It was a pleasant little home as could be, the pretty cottage, with its garden full of flowers, and the inmates true, honest, upright, and well-doing. They had two children, beautiful, as they had a right to be by inheritance—manly, high-spirited little boys, full of life, yet very obedient. Dulcie was both a firm and loving mother. One small thing of two was holding open the heavy gate undeterred by the prancing horses as we passed in.

"There is no bull in the park, is there?" said I, as I proposed to walk home after paying my visit.

"No 'm," answered Dulcie; "but if you should not like the oxen (they come very close sometimes), Teddy will be proud to go home with you and keep them off. Oh! he'll come back alone safe enow—he's to and fro with his father's washings and mendings most days."

Teddy was four years old, and I accepted his protection for the fun of it. We set off together, he marching gravely with a stick about six inches long in his hand, sometimes in front and sometimes by my side. Though the oxen came up curiously to inspect us, he required no care, and did not seem to know the meaning of the word fear, and after his convoy of me was over he returned by his small self as a matter of course.

Every year there seemed to be a fresh bright-eyed baby—all boys. The children did well at the village school, and everything was prosperous with them; but on our next visit there was a cloud on our host's face when I enquired after Derby.

"He's given way again, and after we had forgiven him again and again," said he. "Clara has begged him off for the sake of his wife as well as his own. He's a low-spirited man, and if things go wrong, the devil of craving for a stimulus which relieves his excitement and produces forgetfulness of his troubles, makes him take those abominable cordials which teetotallers cheat themselves with, I believe, for he never was what is commonly called drunk. It is more like madness than a rational appetite, considering what he was risking; but last night was a crisis. I found him quite stupefied when he thought himself safe, and I told him this morning that he must go. It would never do to keep him longer. The household would think we condoned such a thing in a servant whom we liked, and that after all it did not signify. He never could keep order in the place after this."

"What the family will do, I can't think," said Clara sadly.

That day we heard, but not from Dulcie, that Derby had gone home to her in a half wild condition, declaring that he had ruined her and the children and all and every thing. She did not utter a word of reproach or even of regret, but behaved as if nothing had happened.

"I believe he would have gone and thrown himself into the pond if I had so much as said a syllable," she said, when we went down to the cottage that afternoon. She was certainly a very remarkable woman. I never admired her more. She made no weak entreaties for her husband to be taken back again. She knew with what forbearance he had been treated, and she was too just and too sensible not to feel it deeply, and to ask the impossible. She made no lamentation over the hard fate which she was quite guiltless of deserving, and yet she never uttered a word of blame of her husband, or even of grief at the loss of their happy home. One large tear rolled down her cheeks as she said wistfully, "Was there anything else on the estate which he could be employed upon?" and was silent when she was told sorrowfully that his master had thought of this and had found that it was impossible.

They had saved a little money, which Dulcie's thrifty ways had never trenched upon, and, to our horror, took a public house—that usual resource of retired servants.

We remonstrated in vain. "It was a great bargain," they declared; "the owner knew Derby and let him have the goodwill cheap."

It was the only time that I thought Dulcie was to blame; but it seemed as if she had strung her strong will—and it *was* very strong—to follow her husband's fancy, whatever it might be, hoping, perhaps, thereby to help him to resist the fiend of drink.

It was, of course, not long before we heard that the public had failed, and that they were again on the move. They had drifted into London, where Derby begged his former master to give him a character. There was so much that could be truly said in the man's favour that he got a place,

though the story was honestly told. He did not stay in it, however, and then came another and another change. There was always some good reason for it; sometimes it was only a job; sometimes he was so uncomfortable. Probably the only places which he could get with the cloud hanging over him were not pleasant to his fastidious tastes and aspirations, after the years at the Hall.

Poor Dulcie looked sadder and sadder, and aged far beyond her years, while the exquisite neatness natural to her and the comfortable household arrangements were not possible in a wretched London lodging. The little boys got small places and went out on errands. They brought home their wages to their mother, while Derby went in for odd jobs. Whether he drank or not we could not tell—probably he did by fits and starts to drown his recollection. And then we lost sight of them altogether. They had changed their lodging and melted away into the fearful ocean of London poverty, and were too proud and delicate still to ask for help, or to let us know how far they had sunk.

The sort of bitter remorse which poor Derby felt each time he fell was hardly of the kind to help him forwards. Penitence is purely Christian. The old Greek seems not to have felt sin to be sinful, so as to require any strong feeling about it, while remorse was hardly possible to his sunny, sensuous, artistic nature. The strange misunderstandings of God's nature and His intentions to men of distorted Christianity, leading to Trappism on one hand, and Calvinism on the other, seems not to afford any solution. Remorse is purely barren. "Though thou should'st weep a thousand years over the past," as the old vision of St. John declared to Justin Martyr, it would not avail; there must be strong hope and real belief in the future to produce true reform.

The next thing we heard of them was that Derby had got a small subordinate place on a railroad, along which we passed from time to time; but I looked out in vain for him. His post must have been somewhere very far behind the scenes, and we could get no direction as to their dwelling.

One dark, cold November evening, however, we were deposited on the dreary platform of a great junction station, to wait dismally for a cross train to arrive. There was no shelter, the wind was bitter, and we were pacing up and down trying to keep ourselves warm, when I saw a woman with a child in her arms standing near the outer gate, apparently waiting anxiously for some one; the flickering light of a lamp reflected in the wet pavement shone upon her face, but it was so worn and haggard that it was several minutes before I recognised Dulcie. She came up eagerly to us as soon as she saw me.

"She was just a-going to write," she said. Oh, she was so thankful to meet us. "You 'll give your good word to Edward for to say you don't believe as he 'd be guilty of theft," she cried in a passionate tone I had not reckoned on in that deep still nature.

"I know the Digbys would have trusted him with uncounted money, when he lived with them," replied I, very incautiously, as my husband declared, laughing, afterwards.

"Would you speak to Mr. Symons, the director, and tell him so? He 'll be here directly. Only to say what you knew of him in old times, that's all I ask! They don't know him here, and it 'll do no end o' good to certify to character," she cried, seeing the hesitation in Harold's face.

At that moment the hot bustle of the arriving train, which alternates with the dead silence of the intervening vacant times, began again—the rushing of porters and baggage, the elbowing of passengers getting in and out, the screaming of steam whistles, the screeching of engine wheels, seemed to fill the station. Dulcie darted off into the crowd, directed by a compassionate porter, and presently came back walking alongside the hurrying director.

"If, Mr. Symons, sir, you'd only ask the gentleman himself, that is standing there," she was saying pleadingly, as they approached our heap of luggage and ourselves. "It was him I was saying that I thought would speak for us."

Luckily we were acquainted with the great man, or the appeal might have been in vain. He paused, and listened gravely to Harold's cautious testimony, which I saw had far more effect than my eager explanations.

"That 'll do, that 'll do, my good woman ; I 'll have it out with the gentleman," he said importantly. " We 're going the same way, I see," he added, as we all got into the same carriage.

" I hope you may be able to help her," I said, anxiously, as we steamed off, while the last look on poor Dulcie's face, with the deep sadness ground as it were into it, gazing after us, haunted me in the dark night afterwards.

" What has Edward Derby done ? " enquired Harold.

It was soon told. " We 'd found the man to be intelligent and educated, and he 'd been promoted not long before to a porter's place. We 've had a very busy week," said the director, " with a cattle show in the town, and on one of the fullest days a passenger from London put his luggage into the guard's van, particularly a bag containing valuables. It was taken out at the Junction by the departing guard, and delivered to this man Derby with a caution, and he was seen to carry it across the line to another platform, where the passenger himself counted over his possessions on the truck. There was some time to wait before the arrival of the cross train. The passenger says he left Derby with the luggage, while he himself went into the office. He returned only as the train came up ; it was a dark, foggy night, and in the hurry it was only when once more putting his property into another van that he found out his bag was gone. He stopped behind, losing his train, a steam-packet passage, and his temper, which was n't wonderful, considering," laughed the director. " He's been plaguing us about it ever since, but we can hear nothing of the bag. There's no doubt that your friend"—and the director turned to me—" left the station when he'd no right to be away, and the bag was found cut open and rifled behind a shed where it was quite natural he should pass. Another porter, whom

we entirely trust, saw him slinking back to the platform from that side the line. He was exceedingly confused when he was taxed with the loss of the bag, and, in fact, looked as guilty as possible. He got up a defence next morning, that he had been to a public house near, being very tired after the long day's work, and that a very little upsets him, so that he hardly knew what he said the night before—a very fishy story we all thought."

"What he says as to the effects which even the smallest quantity of spirits have upon him is quite true," said Harold. "It has happened before. It may be very difficult, I'm afraid, for him to clear himself; but I truly believe him to be a very honest man."

"We can't afford to have railway servants with any doubt hanging over them. We must trust our men, and have men whom we can trust," answered the director oracularly.

What could we say? The necessity for the rule was self-evident.

We heard afterwards that Derby had been examined before a magistrate, but nothing further had come out. He kept to his first account of himself, and brought up the publican to prove its truth. He declared that his confusion was owing to his having broken his word not to drink, and to the effect of any spirits on his brain. But there had no doubt been time for him to carry off the bag, and get rid of it into an accomplice's hand, and suspicion in such a case was only natural for those who knew but little of him.

Nothing further turned up, and the case was dismissed; but so was poor Derby, as I found when next we came to the Junction. I went down into the town on purpose to see Dulcie in the little lodging which they were still keeping on, in hopes of something turning up. She had regained her composure in the face of the certainty of sorrow, and of the efforts necessary for the bare life of the family; but nothing could be sadder than their prospects.

"The boys is all as good as gold," said she, with an attempt at a smile; "they brings in all they earns, but that 's bitter bread for us to eat, and little enough of it either."

The assizes were going on in the town, which gave Derby a little employment in waiting and the like; but they could not hold on much longer in their present house, she said, and where could they go?

While she was talking, my little protector against the cows (grown now much bigger and stronger) rushed into the room breathless—

"Mother, there's been a thief took up, and ever so many pawnbrokers' tickets found in his things; and I hear tell that the police says there's one for the dress coat was in that there black bag what they said father took. There was a private mark inside of it, the gentleman told 'em of, and they 've fetched it out, and it 's there."


Dulcie looked at me, and did not speak; her colour rose.

"Can't you find your father, and tell him to go into court," she said presently to the boy. "He took it so to heart he should be suspected of such a thing. He keeps out of the way a deal too much. But I knew dirt could n't stick long to such as he!" she said, raising herself proudly.

"They 'd oughter be whipped, the whole bilin' on 'em, as thought for to lay such a thing to father's charge," cried the boy wrathfully.

There must have been much good in the man who inspired such strong affection in wife and children, in the face of the damning fact that his yielding to temptation had so often deprived them of a good home and a good living.

Railroads wait for no sentiment, and I was obliged to go before the end was known, but we heard soon after that the owner of the pawnbroker's tickets had "split" on his confederate, the very porter in whom the director had "the utmost confidence." He had taken advantage of Derby's absence, against orders, to convey the bag away in the dark to a friend loitering about outside, seeking what he could



devour, while the blame was conveniently laid upon Derby, who was a new hand, with his position still to make.

Harold wrote to the authorities in favour of Derby, whose past character now stood him in stead. He was given another trial under strict supervision, and with the protection of the pledge, and once again the man seemed to be set afloat.

He wrote to us gratefully, feeling keenly that he had been helped for the sake of his wife and children, but declaring that he now meant to make a new start, and never be overtaken again after such a lesson.

"I believe he will stand this time," cried I.

"I trust he may," said Harold, "but it's not very hopeful, when this is the fourth or fifth time of the failure of his good resolutions, poor fellow."

"It is almost enough to make one believe in possession, to think of his forgetting everything for a spoonful of spirits, in the face of his better self, and knowing what will be the result."

It was nearly six months after, and again we were at the Junction. As we crossed the wretched platform with no shelter in the grey, windy, comfortless evening, we passed a youngish woman sitting on her box, and noticed the dreary look of her face, and the frightened eyes, which kept glancing backwards and forwards when anyone approached her. I spoke to her, but she did not answer, and a stout, good-tempered looking man standing by her said, in a low voice, "She's come from the Lowbury Union, and I'm the relieving officer taking of her by the down train to the — Asylum."

"It is a very good place, dear," I said, putting my hand on her shoulder as gently as I could, "and you'll get well there very soon, I hope;" but she only looked wildly at me, and could not be persuaded to speak.

Meantime our branch train had come up, and Harold put me into a carriage, though we had still to wait for the down express. It was now in sight, slacking for the station,

when the woman rose suddenly, rushed forward a few yards, and before anyone could prevent her, or even see what she was doing, flung herself down on the rail below, full in the face of the advancing engine. There was a general shout of horror, but everyone seemed paralysed when a porter ran forward, sprung down after the wretched madwoman, and had almost succeeded in dragging her off to the further line, though within a few feet of the train, when she struggled so violently with her would-be preserver that he fell under the wheels. I saw no more, or even so much, the rush and the terror were too great, as the ponderous line of carriages, in spite of every effort of the brake to stop their course, crashed heavily on into the station, and hid the whole tragedy from the line of anxious, powerless beholders.

"Not there, Janet; stay, my love, you can do nothing; remain here," cried Harold, seizing me by the arm. "I will go myself and see."

He returned in a few minutes. "How strange life seems! The woman has escaped by a miracle, whose death would have been almost a blessing, and that brave fellow, the porter, who risked his life for hers, was knocked down in trying to save her, and run over. It's a comfort to hear them say that his death must have been instantaneous."

"A porter," cried I. I saw in his face who it was. "I'm sure that it is Derby, and you know it! Oh poor Dulcie!" and I turned to go, though hardly knowing where. "You must come on, Janet, the train is just starting. You can do nothing now, everybody is anxious to be kind, and I will bring you back later, when you can be of more use. Come, dear."

A day or two later I returned, and went down to the lodging where I had found Dulcie before. Her wide open, tearless eyes looked as if they had not slept since the dreadful scene at the station. Her lips quivered when she saw me, and she began eagerly to tell me how well folk spoke of her husband, and to repeat all the details she had been gathering of the brave deed of which he died.

"Yes, Dulcie, there are not many of us would risk our

lives like that for a poor crazy woman who was nothing to him. His was a strong heart and a true and merciful one, if his will was weak sometimes, and God will be merciful to him."

"I 'm sure we all want that God should have mercy on us," she answered quickly, as if not bearing the shadow of a reflection on her husband.

* * * * *

"And when all seemed for to be coming right for us all," she burst out after a pause. "He had n't touched a drop of anything for six months, and sending the boys to school and paying our way and all."

"What do you think of doing, Dulcie?" said I at last, when we began to discuss the future. "Would you like a cottage at — Hall? I am sure they would gladly help you if they could."

"Oh, not there!" she replied, with a sort of shudder. "We were so happy there together. No, my eldest brother's got the little farm up at Alice Holt, and his wife's dead lately, and his care-keeper's but a poor lot, he writes me word. He'd take me in and the four littlest of the boys. I could do for him and the two cows, and Franky could help in the byre a deal. Teddy could shift for hisself. I've heard of a place for him. The railway folk is very kind for to help all they can. We'd thought of going back to the Holt six months back, that time we were so bad off, but 't were dull and lonesome for Edward, and he did n't take to the thought of farm work—he was n't used to it."

She had evidently never dreamt of considering the question of how the place might suit her. "There's a rail," she went on, "goes now up into the heart of the downs, and the boy could come and see us by times, if we get him something that's not too far off, and all the folks here is kind about us. Maybe I may get some washing somewhere. Abel's a man o' few words, he is, but he'll do his duty by us, and be kind to the children, I know that he would."

"And you'll like to see the dear old place among the

downs again, Dulcie. I remember thinking it all very charming when we saw you there as a baby."

But her mind was too full of the sorrowful present to have any interest left in a past unconnected with it, and it was simply as a port of refuge in her distress that she regarded her old home at present.

The move and the change were made easy for the widow, while her brother accepted her quietly, without any demonstration of joy or pity. On the whole, however, she was dearly welcome to him in the solitary homestead, even with the charge of her little fatherless boys.

Some months afterwards, we got out at a little roadside station near Alice Holt, and walked up to see Dulcie. Instead of following the path, we climbed up to the top of the steep downs above, along part of the line of our old ride in that far off spring-time, with the old cairn and its yews in the distance. The little farm lay as peacefully as of old in its solitary coombe; the apple trees, the springing corn, the wild flowers were all there—the ever-living nature unchanged amidst her constant change. The successors of the calves, the sheep, and the chickens were all and each in their places when we looked down from the ridge in the bright spring afternoon, as they had been "when I walked with one I loved two-and-thirty years ago." * All was the same but the human beings, the central conscient parts of the scene, of the feeling, suffering, enjoying whole. The difference between ourselves of that day, galloping over the downs, with our sunny future before us, and the graver afternoon of the present, was, after all, only a different form of happiness, even with the many anxieties and cares life brings with it, though the past seems incomprehensible and incredible to the young who are just beginning the race. But the contrast between the beautiful child, opening like a bud, as Dulcie had looked that day, and the poor widow after her past sorrows, and amid her many cares, made my very heart ache.

Abel, the man of few words, was busy tethering down

* *In Memoriam*, Sonnet on Canterets.

his cows, with one of the little lads beside him, and had been watching our progress along the sky line of the downs above, attentively. He greeted us almost affectionately when we came within hearing.

"Dulcie 's been telling* the days no end of a time till she should see you again," said he. Then, as he led us towards the house, through the orchard and the wealth of apple-blossom I remembered so well, he added. "'T is pretty natural like for her to come back to the old place, and now she 's wont to it again, I 'm in hopes as she 'll pick up a bit."

When we came into the house-place, indeed, I saw that there was peace. Dulcie's face had regained its calm dignity, in spite of the lines about the mouth, which told of the undying sorrow, the sense of loss, the heart-grief down in the depths of her unforgetting nature. But she was busy, and she felt herself necessary, two of a woman's greatest comforts, and neither her old brother nor her little sons evidently felt that her sorrow interfered with their weal.

Harold went off for a long walk and a visit to the great house, and Dulcie and I sat on a bench before the door, under a budding honeysuckle. We talked on of the boys and the baby, which was just able to walk, and brought me a gilliflower (he was worth his weight in gold as a comfort to his poor mother), of the milk and the meal, of the schooling and the future of the little lads, wherein we could help; of everything, in short, but of what was most filling our minds. At last, as the time for parting drew near, she apoke of her husband. She missed him every hour of the twenty-four; even the cessation of the constant anxiety she had always endured had left an aching blank in her life; the loneliness pressed with a heavy weight upon her; her silent old brother, her chattering children, could not fill the void in that deep still heart.

"But it 's Satan tempting me for to wish him back again, I know it is, and it 's best for him as 't is," she said,

*"And every shepherd tells his tale [counts his number]
Under the hawthorn in the vale."—*Allegro*.

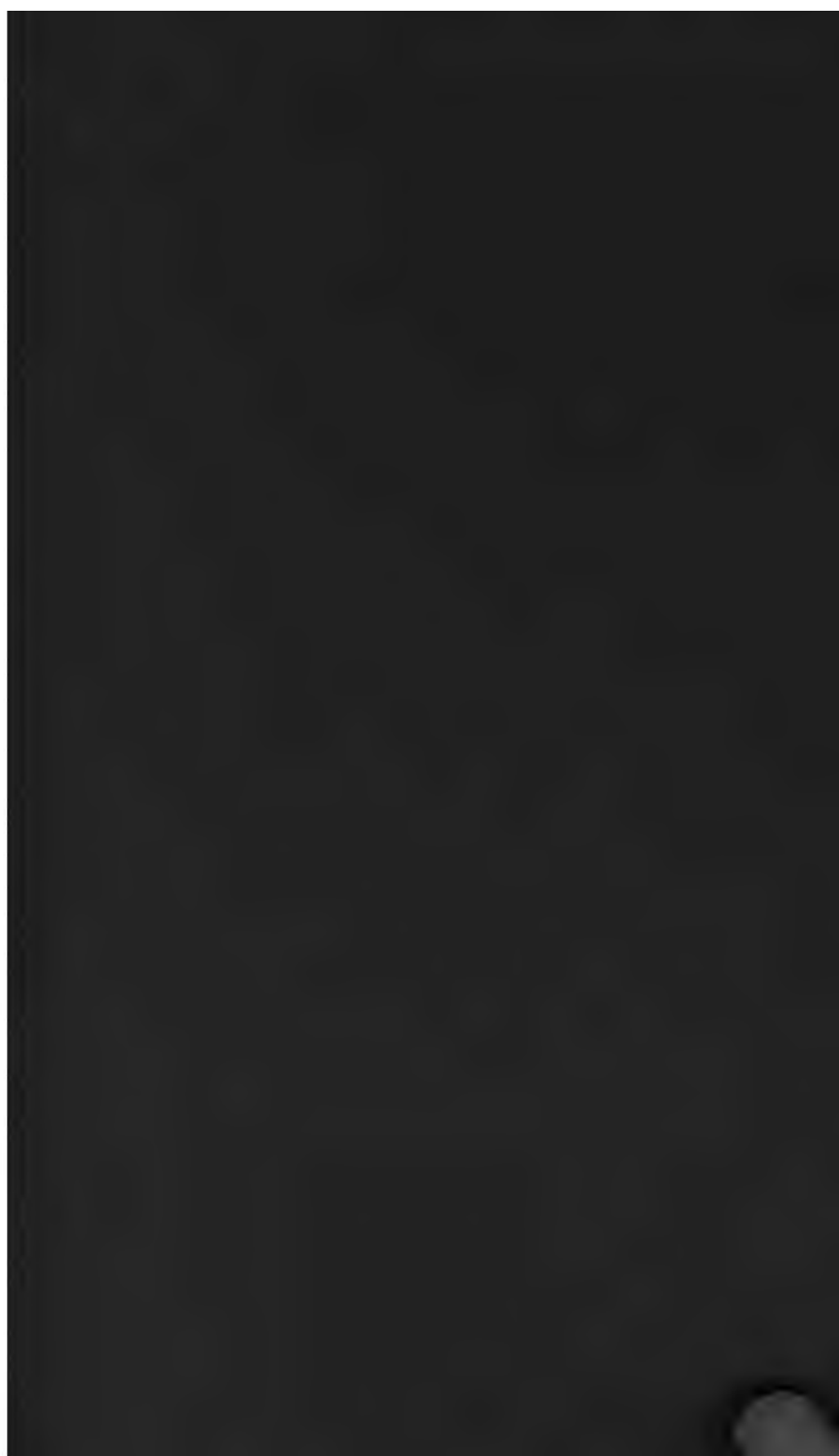
with a' fraid look in her tearless eyes. "I knows he 's safe now. He 'd a sore struggle that last six months. No one can tell what it is, and a woman don't know what 't is to be tempted like that. But he did n't fall, God bless him, and he was help in his necessity, but I 've seen him set his teeth and grow white when they've tried to get him to come in to their spirit shops off station time. And the tempting might ha' come too sore and sudden one day, God knows, and men's lives a-hanging on them trains. And now he 's where the wicked cease from troubling, and he died doing his duty and helpin' a fellow-creature, he did. And his soul has rest, I know that, with the weary and them that has been through the fire." There was something of a yearning mother's love for him mixed with her wifely affection, and of the large mercy of the strong for the weak, although not in her inmost soul did she ever dream of such a thought. "And when my time comes," shè went on, "I shall go to him and be thankful. Not as I 'm in any haste; there 's plenty left to do and to live for, for that matter," she added, with her sad smile, getting up to follow the baby, who was after some mischief as fast as his fat legs could carry him, which required her active intervention.

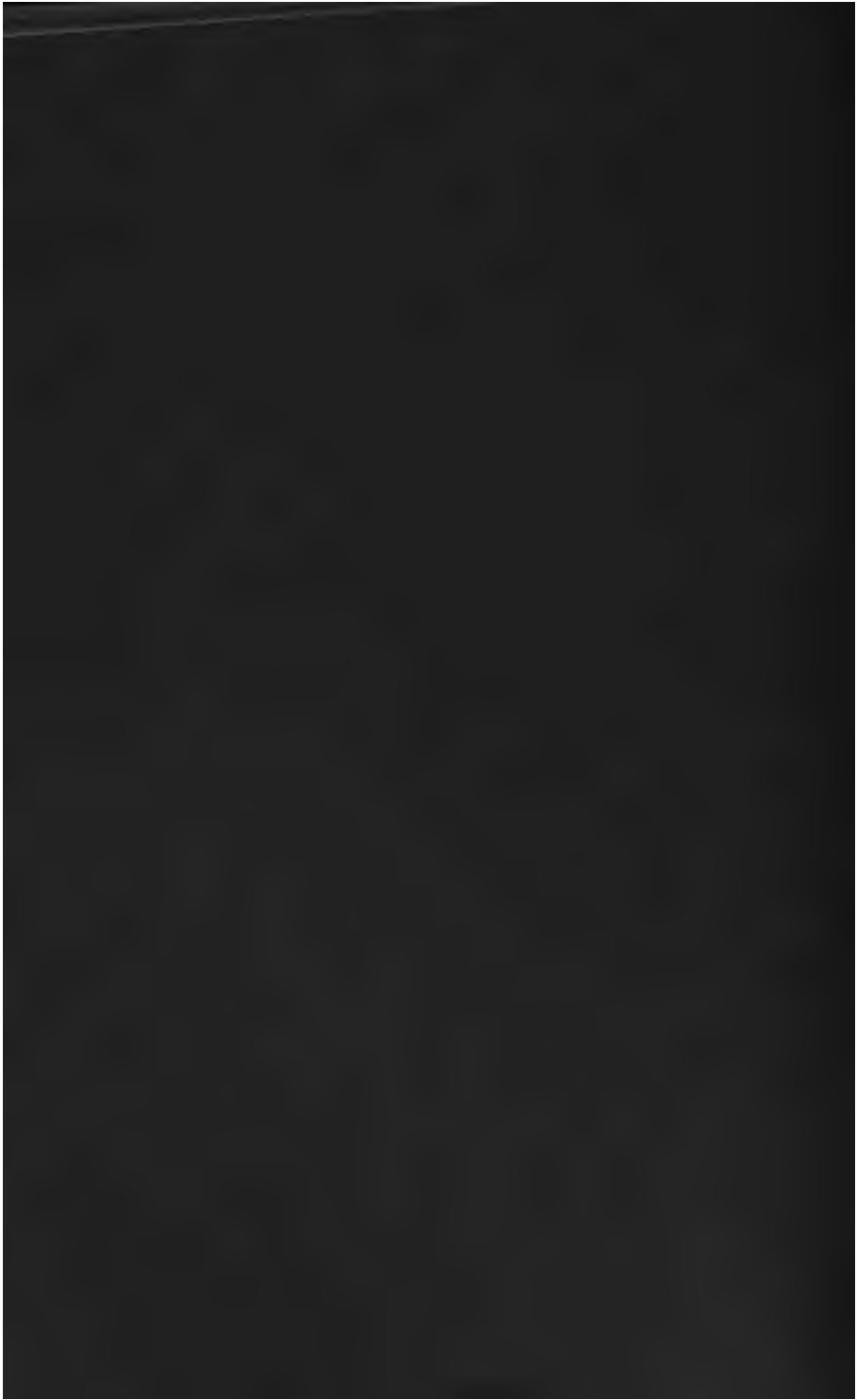
"He 's not as good as you were, Dulcie, at nearly two years old," said I, laughing.

"He 's a boy," replied she, as a quite sufficient explanation. And then we sat still and were silent, as the sun began to go down, and the great shadows fell round us from the hills above the little homestead, there was a lowing of cattle and a bleating of sheep, and the noise of fowls going to roost as three little urchins, healthy and hungry, came trooping in from school and play, eager for their suppers, and it was time for me to go and meet Harold at the station. She walked down with me, unwilling, as it seemed, to lose sight of the link with old times.

And then we parted—she to her work, and I to mine. It is not often given us to see the depths of another's heart in this world; but we two had been very near that day.

THE END.





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